

Role of a Preceptor in Achieving Learning Outcomes: Nursing Intern Perspective

Bothyna Z. Murshid

*Medical Surgical Nursing Department, College of Nursing,
King Saud Bin Abdul-Aziz University for Health Sciences, Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia*

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ABSTRACT This study assesses the perception of an intern nurse related to the role of a preceptor in achieving their learning outcomes throughout the internship clinical learning outcomes. The objective was to examine the nursing intern's perception regarding the role of a preceptor in achieving their best learning performance. Seventy-four intern or nursing students were enrolled for the study and subjected to answer a self-reported questionnaire comprising socio-demographic data and the intern's perception on achieving learning outcomes. Most of the intern students either strongly agreed or agreed regarding the effectiveness of preceptor's role in achieving their learning outcomes during the internship period, a significant relationship between marital status and age of the intern student and their perception of the preceptor's role. Preceptors have proved to be effective and helpful for nursing students in achieving their learning outcomes throughout the clinical experience.

INTRODUCTION

The internship period is the mechanism that facilitates an easy transition into the role of beginning-level staff nurse in a health care setting. During this transitional period, it is not only the learning and refinement of clinical skills that interns must master but also the maturation into the role of being a professionally licensed nurse and the role and responsibility that accompanies licensure (Omer et al. 2016). A successful internship period is very essential to easily facilitate the transition of students to be competent nurses through the help of the experienced preceptors (Duchsher 2010). Successful internship programs should have a teaching and learning, which provides guidance and help to a new intern nurse so that one can move from being a beginner to being an advanced learner and able to demonstrate proficient skill performance and manage real situations specifically in acute and emergency units (Al-Mahmoud et al. 2013).

Address for correspondence:

Bothyna Z. Murshid

Assistant Professor,

Medical Surgical Nursing Department,

College of Nursing,

King Saud Bin Abdul-Aziz University for Health

Sciences,

Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Mobile: +966506103175

E-mail: bothyna.murshid@gmail.com,

murshidb@kasu-hs.edu.sa

Clinical learning in nursing requires an effective facilitated way of learning to ensure nursing students are adequately prepared to achieve the clinical competence for entry-level practice (Kaphagawani and Useh 2013). Pre-service training programs in nursing colleges are essential to help nurses apply theory to practice. Preceptorship is a crucial step of clinical education, and extensive implementation of preceptorship may leave many facets of the preceptor's responsibility inadequately understood (Hall 2016). In the preceptorship type model of training, a nurse is referred to as a preceptor and assigned to one nursing student for facilitating learning in the clinical setting. In the role of a preceptor, the nurse must guide the student and teach them specialty practices, which should allow the learner to gain confidence, expertise, and validation (Leslee 2014).

The preceptor is not only a teacher and supervisor, but one has to also develop a one-to-one relationship with their students in a one-to-one manner and serve as a role model, leader, influencer, evaluator, socialisation agent, and protector novice nurse (Weselby 2014). In addition, the role of the preceptor as clinician and educator may include but is not limited to, assisting the student in articulating theory to practice, evaluating the student's identified learning objectives, and assessing particular patient-care that will enable the student to meet the

learning outcomes. Furthermore, preceptors utilise appropriate teaching methods to help the interns meet his or her learning outcomes, assist the student to develop and improve the psychomotor skills, and evaluate whether the interns' learning outcomes that have been provided by the college faculty have been achieved. Preceptors integrate the interns into the role of the nurse practitioner, demonstrates attitudes and qualities consistent with leadership management, assist the nursing faculty in the evaluation of intern performance and demonstrate a role model in code of ethics in the health professions, including autonomy, integrity, justice, non-maleficence, advocate, and justice (Dimitriadou et al. 2015)

To understand the level of students' competencies, skills and knowledge that one has acquired during the session of training, the descriptive learning outcomes that students will be judged based on why that knowledge and skills will be useful to them. Learning outcomes centre on the framework and prospective applications of acquired knowledge and skills, help them to connect learning in various contexts and help in assessment and evaluation processes (Atakro and Gross 2016). Moreover, an intended learning outcome addresses student performance and describes what students should be able to know or to do at the end of the course that they could not prior to it (Karen and Janis 2015).

In Saudi Arabia, with the vast and swift technological advances, the intern nursing students subsequently need to pass a successful and fruitful intern period to help them gain knowledge and master clinical experience, obtain good communication skills and administration ability to enable them to achieve the learning outcome of the intern period. Although most of the hospitals in Saudi Arabia have preceptors with clear roles and responsibilities, still little research has been published about the perception of nursing interns regarding their satisfaction with the role of the preceptor in achieving learning outcomes of the intern period.

Objectives

The primary objective of this study was to examine the nursing intern's perception regard-

ing the role of a preceptor in achieving their learning outcomes. In addition, this study assesses the intern's perception regarding preceptors' role in improving their psychomotor skills, leadership role, and administrative capability, enhance their critical thinking and facilitate their cognitive ability. The study would help to understand how one intern in the role of preceptors can develop their communication skill, integrate their knowledge into practice and become a role model for the learner in utilise information technology in clinical practice.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Ethical Consideration

The approval of the present research study was obtained from the research unit of the college of nursing, dean of the college and King Abdulla International Medical Research Centre, Riyadh, KSA. Study participants were told about the objectives of the study, their identity was kept confidential and they had the freedom to participate and withdraw at any time during the study. Students who agreed to participate were asked to provide consent.

Setting

The study was conducted in different wards in King Fahad Medical City and King Abdulla Specialised Children Hospitals affiliated to the National Guard, Riyadh, where intern students of King Saud Bin Abdul-Aziz University (KSAU), Riyadh are assigned for their intern period. Data were collected from February to March 2018 from intern nursing students.

Research Design

The research study adopted the methodology of descriptive design is used to examine the study objectives.

Sample

A convenience sample of 74 intern nursing students who are graduated from College of Nursing, Riyadh, KSAU through the academic year 2016-2017 were chosen because they have

finished phase one and two of the internship period.

The inclusion criteria were that the interns nursing students were willing and agreed to participate in the study and finished both phases one and two of the intern period and had graduated through the academic year 2016-2017 from the college of nursing, Riyadh, KSAU.

Exclusion Criteria

Intern nursing students from previous academic years or different universities, and who did not finish the two phases of the internship training field experience, were excluded from the study.

Tools of the Study

A self-reported questionnaire was used to attain the purpose of the study and comprised of two parts:

Part I: Socio-demographic variables, which include code, age, marital status, and grade point average (GPA).

Part II: After extensive review of the related literature, this part was adopted and modified to assess the intern student’s perception regarding a preceptor’s role on achieving the learning outcomes of the field experience. It contained 27 intended learning outcomes of the internship where 23 of them were developed by the Jeddah College of Nursing’s faculty, KSAU, (<http://conj.ksau-hs.edu.sa/index.php/intended-learning-outcomes-of-Internship-field-experience>) and 4 more learning outcomes had been added by the researcher (that is, recognise informed career decision, perform progressive development and broadening of clinical skills, carry out nursing care needs of a full patient load in the day, night and over the weekend, and demonstrate effectively all required clinical competencies). The questionnaire was reviewed by four experts in the nursing specialty in Riyadh College of Nursing, and the administrative personnel in the hospital tested its content validity for clarity and applicability.

For the purpose of the present study, the responses of the nursing student interns were categorised on a 5-point Likert scale with 5 (strongly agree), 4 (agree), 3 (undecided) 2 (dis-

agree) and 1 (strongly disagree). A pilot study was conducted with four students to test the reliability of the tools, and the test-retest was calculated at an interval of two weeks and those students were excluded from the study subjects.

The Procedure of Data Collection

At first intern nursing students were told about the study objectives, voluntary to participate and their right to withdraw at any time throughout the study process without any interference with their evaluation. Students were asked to provide consent if they agreed to take a part in the study. Confidentiality was ensured throughout the study process, and the students were assured that all data would be used only for research purpose. The questionnaire was applied once to each student immediately when they finished the intern period and collected two days later to give them time to complete the questionnaire in their free time.

RESULTS

This study aimed to examine the nursing intern’s perception regarding the role of their preceptor in achieving learning outcomes. Using a descriptive design, 70 intern nursing students who finished their internship period were included. Demographic results are shown in Table 1, including the demographic factors of the intern student were age, marital status, and GPA. Results showed a mean age of 22.60 ±1.04 years old and a mean of 4.20 ±3.64 for GPA and majority of the intern students were singles (85.7%), and only 14.3 percent were married.

Table 1: Demographic data of intern nursing students

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Mean±SD</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Age	22.60 ± 1.04	
Marital Status		
Single		85.7
Married		14.3
GPA	4.20 ± 3.64	

Table 2 presents the intern students’ perception regarding the preceptor’s role in achieving learning outcomes. The results of this table indicated that majority of the intern nursing stu-

Table 2: Intern student's perception regarding preceptor role on achieving learning outcome

<i>S. No.</i>	<i>Statement</i>	<i>Strongly agree %</i>	<i>Agree %</i>	<i>Neutral %</i>	<i>Disagree %</i>	<i>Strongly disagree %</i>
1	Integrate theoretical knowledge and concepts related to nursing, basic, and social sciences into nursing practice	30.0	47.1	18.6	1.4	2.9
2	Recognize the knowledge and theory foundation related to core nursing interventions and skills.	31.4	48.6	17.1	1.4	1.4
3	Evaluate patients' health conditions in a systematic manner within standards of professional practice.	34.3	47.1	15.7	1.4	1.4
4	Plan holistic patient and family centred care utilizing the nursing process framework.	27.1	50.0	17.1	4.3	1.4
5	Evaluate research evidence necessary to guide professional nursing practice	11.4	42.9	32.9	5.7	7.1
6	Demonstrate utilization of critical thinking skills in making informed decisions related to the care of patients	27.1	51.4	18.6	1.4	1.4
7	Recognize the structure of the practice settings and its available services needed to facilitate patient care delivery	21.4	61.4	12.9	0	4.3
8	Conduct self professionally.	40.0	45.7	12.9	0.0	1.4
9	Assume responsibility and accountability for own decisions and actions.	45.7	44.3	10.0	0	0
10	Work effectively with interdisciplinary team in order to meet the healthcare needs of patients and their families.	45.7	47.1	5.7	0.0	1.4
11	Demonstrate effective time management skills.	37.1	48.6	12.9	0	1.4
12	Incorporate professional values including ethical and legal aspects into the practice of nursing.	20.0	58.6	20.0	0.0	1.4
13	Demonstrate basic clinical leadership skills.	31.4	54.3	10.0	2.9	1.4
14	Explore available career pathways within nursing most suitable for future employment.	21.4	34.3	30.0	5.7	8.6
15	Recognize an informed career decision	15.7	44.3	30.0	5.7	4.3
16	Advocate human dignity and patients/families' rights.	31.4	41.4	20.0	2.9	4.3
17	Provide health education for patients, families/caregivers.	44.3	30.0	18.6	1.4	5.7
18	Demonstrate mastery of basic mathematical calculation necessary for nursing care delivery	27.1	53.3	17.1	0.0	1.4
19	Utilize nursing informatics and technology in reviewing, reporting and documenting day to day patient care.	40.0	40.0	15.7	1.4	2.9
20	Communicate effectively verbally and non-verbal with patients, families, interdisciplinary team.	45.7	37.1	12.9	0.0	4.3
21	Document nursing care plan and interventions effectively using legal and professional documentation.	37.1	38.6	24.3	0.0	0.0
22	Perform comprehensive physical assessment for individuals across life span.	31.4	40.0	21.4	7.1	0.0
23	Perform nursing skills stipulated in the Internship curriculum within satisfactory performance level	34.3	44.3	14.3	1.4	5.7
24	Carry an assigned patient load and deliver holistic nursing care within standards of practice guidelines.	45.7	37.1	14.3	0.0	2.9
25	Perform progressive development of clinical skills.	38.6	48.6	11.4	1.4	0.0
26	Carry out nursing care needs of a full patient load	35.7	47.1	14.3	0.0	2.9
27	Demonstrate effectively all required clinical competencies	35.7	50.0	7.1	1.4	5.7

dents at 92.8 percent and 90.0 percent either strongly agreed or agreed with the preceptor role in achieving their learning outcomes of internship field experience as related to efficient achiever in interdisciplinary team to meet the healthcare needs of patients community. Assuming responsibility and accountability for own decisions and actions respectively followed by 87.2 percent, related to perform progressive development of clinical skills and 85.7 percent each for, conduct self professionally, demonstrate effective time management skills, demonstrate basic clinical leadership skills, and demonstrate effectively all required clinical competencies.

On the other hand, only a small percent of the intern students at 1.4 percent each strongly disagreed with the effectiveness of the preceptor role in achieving learning outcomes of the internship field experience regarding efficient in an interdisciplinary team, effective time management skills, incorporate professional values of ethical and legal aspects into the practice of nursing, while none of them disagreed or strongly disagreed about the preceptor’s role to help them to take responsibility and accountability for their own decisions and demonstrate basic clinical leadership skills, and demonstrate effectively all required clinical competencies.

In addition, less than a third of the intern students at 32.9 percent, 30.0 percent and 30.0 percent, were neutral in their perception of the preceptor role in achieving learning outcomes of field experience regarding appraise research evidence essential to guide professional nursing practice, discover available career pathways within nursing most suitable for future employment, and recognize an informed career decision respectively followed by less than fourth, 24.3 percent, 21.4 percent, 20 percent regarding, document nursing care plan and interventions ef-

fectively following standards of legal and professional documentation, perform comprehensive physical assessment for individuals across life span, and incorporate professional values including ethical and legal aspects into the practice of nursing, respectively. Moreover, only a small and same 10.0 percent of the students were neutral regarding, assume responsibility and accountability for own decisions and actions, and demonstrate basic clinical leadership skills.

As correlation is presented in Table 3, it indicates that correlation among demographic data of intern nursing students and their perception showed a significant relationship between marital status of the intern student and their perception of the preceptor’s role as related to, evaluate patients’ health conditions in a systematic manner within standards of professional practice, and demonstrate basic clinical leadership skills, means that married intern students was more satisfied than singles with the preceptor’s role regarding the mentioned learning outcomes (($r = .30$, $p = .010$) and ($r = .24$, $p = .045$) respectively). In addition there was a positive significant relationship between the intern age and their perception, which means that older intern students either strongly agreed or agreed about the effectiveness of the preceptor’s role in achieving the intended learning outcomes of their field experience related to performing comprehensive physical assessment for individuals across their life span ($r = .32$, $p = .007$).

DISCUSSION

The present study assessed the perception of intern nursing students related to the role of a preceptor in achieving their learning outcomes in King Fahad Medical City and King Abdul-Aziz Specialised Children Hospitals affiliated to

Table 3: Correlation between demographic data of intern nursing students and their perception

<i>Intern perception</i>	<i>Demographic data</i>	
	<i>Age</i>	<i>Marital status</i>
Evaluate patients’ health conditions in a systematic manner within standards of professional practice.	r	.30
Demonstrate basic clinical leadership skills	P Value	.010
	r	.24
	P Value	.045
Perform comprehensive physical assessment for individuals across life span.	r	.32
	P Value	.007

National Guard, with a total of 70 participants included in the study. The internship training period is crucial for intern students to enable them to engage into specialty practice, and allow them to try new skills, and improve communication abilities while gaining confidence and validation and offering opportunities for career growth, autonomy, leading to active participation in the team. The mean age of studied intern group was 22.60 ± 1.04 years, which is congruent with Al-Mahmoud et al. (2013) and Ellemes et al. (2017).

Results of this study proved that most of the intern students either strongly agree or agree regarding the effectiveness of preceptor's role in achieving their learning outcomes during the intern clinical skill experience. This study supports Ellemes et al. (2017) who stated that clinical preceptors assist the learners or students to achieve expertise of clinical functioning and create a positive learning environment facilitating a smooth and comprehending way of learning. In addition, Atakro and Gross (2016) reported a similar result that the preceptorship model of clinical teaching provides a positive clinical learning environment for students. Other study groups Dimitriadou et al. (2015) and Christiansen et al. (2014) were in line and reported preceptors to encourage the students to gain confidence and sense of professional identity up to a student's satisfaction, meeting their individual learning needs. Bvumbwe (2016) shows that collaborating training institutions with clinical settings improves the nursing students' capability, thereby ensuring enhanced learning outcomes. A high percentage of the participants mentioned that their preceptor was helpful for them to conduct self professionally, Leslee (2014) supported this result and stated that students believed their experience with the preceptorship had a positive impact on their professional growth in the area of general professionalism.

The present study revealed that the majority of the participants perceived the preceptors as being helpful in respect of, efficient worker in an interdisciplinary team in order to meet the requirement of healthcare for the patients and their families, taking responsibility and accountability for own decisions, perform progressive development of clinical skills, conduct self professionally, demonstrate effective time management

skills, demonstrate basic clinical leadership skills, and demonstrate effectively all required clinical competencies, and this result in agreement with Ellemes et al. (2017), who proved that the students reported that the preceptors were a valued resource as they facilitated their learning through guidance and direct support during practical procedure and improved communication with other health care personnel. Jokelainen et al. (2011) was in line and added that the quality of the relationship between a preceptor and a student is an important factor for effective clinical learning, which contributes to progressive development of clinical skills.

In addition, results of the present study illustrated that most of the participants strongly agreed and agreed that preceptors were helpful to integrate theoretical knowledge and concepts related to nursing, basics, and social sciences into nursing practice, demonstrate utilisation of critical thinking skills in making informed decisions related to the care of patients, and demonstrate effectively all required clinical competencies, which is supported by other researchers such as Jokelainen et al. (2011), Luhanga et al. (2015) and Atakro and Gross (2016) who reported that through preceptorship the students improve hands-on practice and develop an understanding of relevant care processes in nursing practice, thereby bridging the theory-practice gap, and adding that the one-on-one relationship, which takes place between the student and the preceptor contributes to the improvement in clinical and psychomotor skills, thereby promotion of clinical competence, and enhancement of critical thinking. On the other hand, Leslee (2014) contradicts the result of the present study and illustrates that students did not believe their critical thinking skills or confidence level significantly changed during the preceptorship program.

The participants in the present study agreed about the effectiveness of preceptor's role with respect to communicating effectively verbally and non-verbally with patients, families, and interdisciplinary team, which is supported by Dias et al. (2015) who proved that preceptors connect the learner to host institutions and clinical settings with team members where communication is the backbone of the preceptorship model, which ensures effective teaching, learning to gain expertise and promotes mutual trust and

cooperation, thereby contributing towards positive clinical learning environment subsequently enhance achievement of learning outcome.

CONCLUSION

Intern nursing students perceived the preceptorship to be an invaluable learning experience that enhanced their competence in the clinical setting to improve overall professionalism during the preceptorship program by the help of their preceptors. Preceptors have proved to be effective and helpful for intern nursing students in achieving their learning outcomes throughout the clinical field experience. Attainment of learning outcomes by intern nursing students during clinical field experience depending on the cooperation and support students can receive from preceptors.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Most of the interns agreed that preceptors had a significant role during the internship period, which proved to be effective for achieving their learning outcomes throughout the clinical experience. Attainment of learning outcomes by intern nursing students during clinical postings depended on the cooperation and support students received from preceptors. Further research with a larger sample and comparison between two consequent groups of intern students examining more factors will contribute to improving learning outcomes.

LIMITATIONS

Although this study has a small number of participants, it was good enough at the statistical point of view, which could not affect the generalisation of results. Data collection was also limited to quantitative methods and using the qualitative approach of data collection accordance with the quantitative method would have provided a richer analysis of the data. Studying further details regarding the effectiveness of the preceptor's role on patients' outcomes would provide a broader view of the intern field experience.

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