



Research Article

NURSING STUDENTS PERCEPTION TOWARDS THEIR LEARNING ENVIRONMENT AND THEIR PERCEIVED ACADEMIC STRESS

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ABSTRACT

Background: The purpose of the study was to assess the perception of nursing students towards their learning environment and to identify their perceived academic stress. **Method:** A cross sectional study was performed on 121 nursing students using self administered questionnaire. **Result:** The study revealed that students have favorable perception towards their environment except few areas which require modification. 62.81% of students reported moderate level of stress. There was a strong negative correlation $r = -0.579$ ($p=0.00$) found between perception towards learning environment and perceived academic stress. Among the demographic variables, a significant association was found between Gender (χ^2 5.193, $p=0.023$) and perception towards learning environment. Type of family (χ^2 11.161, $p= 0.025$) and economic support (χ^2 8.988, $p=0.011$) were found significantly associated with perceived academic stress. **Conclusion:** Measures can be taken, such as training programme for clinical instructors to provide a good and conducive learning environment where students enjoy their learning.

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INTRODUCTION

Creating a suitable learning environment is an important aspect of teaching. There are several factors that influence learning, but a crucial step is the engagement of the learner. This is affected by their motivation and perception of relevance. These, in turn, can be affected by learners' previous experiences and preferred learning styles and by the context and environment in which the learning is taking place. Hutchinson (2003) pointed out that teaching is as much about setting the context or climate for learning as it is about imparting knowledge or sharing expertise¹.

For many undergraduate students, university life is a major transition in their lives since they are accorded the chance to decide what to do without the undue influence of their parents. Parveen A and Inayat S (2017), in their study stated that nursing students are subjected to different kinds of stressors, such as the pressure of academics, lack of expected career advancement, fear of an uncertain future, fear of making mistake in clinical placement and criticism from peers and senior staffs.

The environment in which learning takes place can have an impact on the outcome of learning and the progress a student makes during their college years.

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Learning environment assessment findings can be used to improve or modify the existing learning environment and plan for better teaching- learning activities. In a study conducted by Pinar S (2016) to assess nursing students' perceptions about clinical learning environment in Turkey revealed that students are negatively affected by communication errors and feedbacks given in the presence of patients by instructors. The constant presence of instructors was a source of stress for some students. The study concluded that, in order to ensure favorable learning environment to students, it is essential to improve cooperation between school staff and clinical staff, instructors should be skillful and students should be supported in the clinical environment.

The academic environment, in which students live, contributes to the levels of academic stress. The environmental demands are quite different from one student to another. The inability to integrate in the academic and social environment may cause psychological distress to the students. In the academic environment, high expectations, information overload, academic pressure, unrealistic ambitions, limited opportunities, and high competitiveness are some of the common sources of stress that create tension, fear, and anxiety in students. Vivek B. Waghchavare *et al* in their study (2012) stated that stress level among hosteller students were found to be high comparing to students living elsewhere. In another study conducted by Ositoye, Muiyiwa and Ade (2010) examined the influence and relationship between birth order and students' academic achievement. The result showed a significant

difference in the first born and latter born mean academic achievement. First born performed better than the latter born.

According to a cross-sectional study carried out by Singh A *et al* (2011) in a nursing college located in North India to assess perceived stress among the undergraduate students revealed high levels of psychological disturbance among nursing undergraduate students in the middle phase of the course. Female students significantly had more mean perceived stress score (31.33) than male students (26.01). The maximum mean perceived stress score (29.66) was observed in the 2nd year students, and the least mean perceived stress score (26.28) was found in the 3rd year students.

As there were very few studies done to identify how nursing students perceive the learning environment provided to them and the level of stress they perceive during their study period, it is necessary to carry out such studies which would assist educators and college administration personnel to introspect, devise and incorporate the best strategy for the improvement of educational environment and create a comfortable and eustress environment and thus modify the quality of learning.

METHOD

Study design

A cross sectional study was carried out.

Samples

The participants consisted of 121 nursing students of 2nd and 3rd year B.Sc and GNM Nursing, selected using purposive sampling. The participants received an information sheet which described the details of the study. An informed consent was obtained from all the participants prior to data collection. Approval from the institutional ethical committee was obtained prior to the study.

Materials and methods of data collection

The questionnaire consisted of three sections. Section: I consisted of demographic data of the participant such as age, gender, place of living, type of family, order of birth, economic support, reason for selecting the course and medium of instruction of schooling. Section :II Consisted of modified DREEM inventory to assess the perception of nursing students towards their learning environment. The questionnaire consisted of 45 items relevant to the learning environment. All items on the scale were positive and rated it on a 5 point likert scale ranging from strongly agree (5), Agree(4), Not sure (3), Disagree (2) and strongly disagree (1). Section: III consisted of rating scale to assess the students perceived academic stress which was developed by the investigator with the help of clinical psychologist. This scale consisted of 20 items describing the stress in institution/ college life from various sources. It was rated on a 5 point likert scale ranging from Always (5), Usually (4), Sometimes (3), Rarely (2) and Never (1).

Scoring system

Perception towards learning environment: Item analysis was done to pinpoint more specific strengths and weakness of the learning environment provided to the students. Individual statements on the scale was assessed considering ratings strongly disagree, disagree, and not sure as unfavorable perception and ratings strongly agree and agree as favorable perception. Each domain on the scale was assessed using mean

score. A score of above 50% represented a favorable environment. Perceived academic stress: The ratings on the scale was interpreted as: score <50 Mild stress, score 50-75 moderate stress, score >75 severe stress.

Analysis

Demographic variables were presented using descriptive statistics. Karl Pearson’s correlation was used to correlate perception towards learning environment and perceived academic stress. Chi square test was used to find association between demographic variables and perception towards learning environment and between demographic variables perceived academic stress. P≤ 0.05 was considered statistically significant.

RESULT

Distribution of demographic variables shows that maxim participants were between the age group 18-23 yrs and were females. Most of the participants were living with their family and were from nuclear family. 46% of the participants were youngest ones of the family. 91% of the participants were supported economically by their parents. 55% of the participants selected the course by own interest and 62% were from Gujarati medium.

Table I Frequency and percentage distribution of Demographic Variables

Sr. No	Variable	Frequency	Percentage
1	Age		
	18-23yrs	117	96.69
	24-29yrs	3	2.48
2	30-35yrs	1	0.83
	Gender		
	Male	5	4.13
3	Female	116	95.87
	Place of Living		
4	Hostel	47	38.84
	With Family	74	61.16
5	Type of Family		
	Nuclear	76	62.81
	Joint	42	34.71
6	Extended	3	2.48
	Order of Birth		
	Eldest	36	30.00
7	Middle	28	23.33
	Youngest	56	46.67
	Economic Support		
8	Parents	111	91.74
	Education Loan	5	4.13
	Scholarship	5	4.13
9	Reason for selecting the Course		
	Forced by parents	11	9.09
	Own choice	67	55.37
10	Suggested by friends/relatives	43	35.54
	Medium of instruction of schooling		
	English	46	38.02
11	Gujarati	75	61.98

Frequency and percentage distribution of individual items on the learning environment scale shows that the students have favorable perception towards most of the items listed in the scale. Few items require immediate attention. Only 54% said that they are enjoying the student life. Only 52% agreed that clinical instructors’ are friendly and are helpful in learning.

Table 2 Frequency and percentage distribution of individual items on the learning environment scale

Sr. No	Students perception towards physical facilities	Favorable perception and		Unfavorable perception	
		(Frequency and percentage)		(Frequency and percentage)	
1	Institution has well ventilated and equipped class rooms	103	(85.12)	18	(14.88)
2	Institution has well equipped labs and library	107	(88.43)	14	(11.57)
3	Institution has good supportive facilities (safe drinking water, toilets, canteen, common room etc)	83	(68.6)	38	(31.4)
4	Environment is safe and secured	111	(91.74)	10	(8.264)
	Students perception towards academic atmosphere				
5	The atmosphere is relaxed	70	(57.85)	51	(42.15)
6	The course is well organized	108	(89.26)	13	(10.74)
7	There are opportunities for me to develop interpersonal skills	110	(90.91)	11	(9.091)
8	The atmosphere motivates me as a learner	88	(72.73)	33	(27.27)
9	There is a good support system for students who get stressed	57	(47.11)	64	(52.89)
10	Environment is conducive for learning	105	(86.78)	16	(13.22)
11	The environment helps in the overall development of the students	91	(75.21)	30	(24.79)
	Students perception towards teaching learning activity				
12	I feel comfortable in teaching sessions	92	(76.03)	29	(23.97)
13	I am able to concentrate well	88	(72.73)	33	(27.27)
14	I am encouraged to clarify my doubts in the class	112	(92.56)	9	(7.438)
15	Teaching is student centered	103	(85.12)	18	(14.88)
16	I am clear about the learning objectives of the course	112	(92.56)	9	(7.438)
17	The teaching encourages me to be an active learner	100	(82.64)	21	(17.36)
18	Examinations are well planned	103	(85.12)	18	(14.88)
19	The lectures are regular	112	(92.56)	9	(7.438)
20	Students are encouraged to participate in co curricular activities	89	(73.55)	32	(26.45)
	Students perception towards teachers				
21	Teachers are knowledgeable	107	(88.43)	14	(11.57)
22	Teachers are hard working	111	(91.74)	10	(8.264)
23	Teachers have effective communication skills	87	(71.9)	34	(28.1)
24	Teachers are good at providing feedback to the students	96	(79.34)	25	(20.66)
25	Teachers are well prepared for their teaching sessions	107	(88.43)	14	(11.57)
26	Teachers are patient enough to explain which is difficult to grasp	101	(83.47)	20	(16.53)
27	Teacher facilitates learning rather than controlling it	98	(80.99)	23	(19.01)
28	Teachers prepare students to learn than to pass through exam	95	(78.51)	26	(21.49)
29	There is no favouritism shown by teachers	62	(51.24)	59	(48.76)
30	Teachers are highly disciplined	96	(79.34)	25	(20.66)
	Students academic self perception				
31	I am confident about passing this year	112	(92.56)	9	(7.43)
32	I feel I am being well prepared for my profession	111	(91.74)	10	(8.26)
33	I am able to memorize all I need	112	(92.56)	9	(7.43)
34	I am regular to the college	115	(95.04)	6	(4.95)
35	My problem solving skills are being well developed here	97	(80.17)	24	(19.83)
36	I am enjoying my student life	65	(53.72)	56	(46.28)
	Students perception of clinical learning environment				
37	I enjoy going to my clinical posting	85	(70.25)	36	(29.75)
38	Clinical postings help me to learn a lot	113	(93.39)	8	(6.61)
39	Clinical instructors are friendly and help me in learning	69	(57.02)	52	(42.98)
40	I am well prepared for my clinical postings	105	(86.78)	16	(13.22)
41	My responsibilities in clinical postings are clearly communicated	111	(91.74)	10	(8.26)
42	Nursing staffs are positive role models	48	(39.67)	73	(60.33)
43	Wide range of learning opportunities are available	106	(87.6)	15	(12.4)
44	Clinical instructors are knowledgeable and provide proper guidance	65	(53.72)	56	(46.28)
45	Hospital staffs are cooperative	45	(37.19)	76	(62.81)

Table 3 Overall perceived academic stress

Perceived Academic Stress		
1	Mild Stress	40 (33.06)
2	Moderate stress	76 (62.81)
3	Severe stress	5 (4.13)

73% of the students didn't agree that 'Nursing staffs are positive role models'. 46% of the students didn't agree with the statement that 'Clinical instructors are knowledgeable and provide proper guidance'. 63% of the students stated that hospital staff is not cooperative.

It was also noted that only 5 (4.13%) of the students were having severe stress. Majority 76(62.81%) were experiencing moderate level of stress.

A strong negative correlation $r = -0.579$ ($p=0.00$) was found between perception towards learning environment and perceived academic stress.

It indicates that as the perception towards learning environment becomes favorable the academic stress decreases. Gender was found to have significant influence on perception towards learning environment and type of family and economic support was significantly associated with perceived academic stress (Table:4).

DISCUSSION

Continuous quality improvement is essential in faculty of nursing. Extra importance has to be given to the students' perception of their environmental learning. Their perception may be used to initiate change and development. It is also necessary to identify the academic stress perceived by the students so that measures can be taken to decrease their stress level and the performance can be improved.

The present study findings revealed that students perceived the learning environment as favorable though few areas require modification. Only 54% said that they are enjoying the student life. Only 52% agreed that clinical instructors' are friendly and are helpful in learning. 73% of the students didn't agree that 'Nursing staffs are positive role models'. 46% of the students could not agree with the statement that 'Clinical instructors are knowledgeable and provide proper guidance'. 63% of the students stated that hospital staff is not cooperative. This finding is in agreement with the study conducted to compare nursing students' perceptions of the academic learning environment in Pediatric and Maternity courses using DREEM Questionnaire. The total mean score for pediatric and maternity nursing students' perception of their learning environment were 115.0 ± 23.02 and 110.3 ± 17.4 ; respectively. All students agreed to a more positive approach regarding their learning "moving in the right direction" for their teachers, feeling "more on the positive side" for their academic self perception, feeling "more on the positive side" for their learning atmosphere "a more positive attitude" they also reported that their social self perceptions were "not too bad". The results showed that 10% of both pediatrics and maternity students have mean score ≤ 2 consider problem areas.

The study also revealed that 63% of the students were under moderate stress and there was a strong negative correlation between perception towards learning environment and perceived academic stress. The results are consistent with the findings of the research conducted by Kohoulat N *et al* (2017) on medical students of Shiraz University of medical sciences where, the results of this study showed that academic emotions are differentially affected by perceived learning environment by students.

Limitations

Although the results of the study are indicator of how nursing students perceive their learning environment, the present study offers no comparison with the expectation of students. The stress levels of the students were identified, but various stressors are not included in the study. Only the 2nd and 3rd year nursing students were included in the study so the results are not representative of all nursing students. The participants were selected from only one nursing institution. So the findings cannot be generalized to all nursing institutions.

Recommendations

In-service education and training programmes can be planned for the clinical instructors so that they may be able to guide the students well in the clinical areas. It is also necessary to improve teacher - student interaction through mentorship or teacher guardian programmes, where the teacher can identify students who are in need of help and necessary measures can be taken to support them

CONCLUSION

This study has provided some useful information regarding students perception towards the learning environment provided to them and the level of stress they are experiencing. Result of the study suggests that clinical environment need to be improved. Cohesion between nursing students and hospital staffs must be ensured by involving hospital staff in planning and implementing clinical activities of the students.

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