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Descriptive Qualitative Study of Nursing Students' Perceptions and Behaviors During Student-led Class Sessions in Uganda

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Abstract

Introduction:

Student-led class sessions are a pedagogical approach where students actively engage in the learning process, influencing content, activities, and pace. This method fosters independent learning, communication skills, and teamwork. While some studies have shown the effectiveness of student-led sessions, nursing students often exhibit challenges, such as inattention and negative attitudes, affecting the quality of learning and patient care. Understanding nursing students' perceptions and behaviors in this context is essential for improving nursing education.

Methods:

This descriptive qualitative study aimed to explore nursing students' perceptions and behaviors during student-led class sessions at Uganda Christian University. Sixteen direct-entry nursing students from years two to four participated in focus group discussions.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, transcribed, and analyzed thematically. Ethical approval was obtained, and informed consent was obtained from all participants.

Results:

Five themes emerged: beneficial aspects, non-beneficial aspects, strategies for effective sessions, appropriate behaviors, and inappropriate behaviors. Sub-themes included self-confidence, understanding, cooperation, negative attitudes, increased anxiety, lecturer assistance, setting objectives, and self-awareness.

Discussion:

Student-led class sessions offer benefits such as enhancing self-confidence and understanding while fostering cooperation. However, challenges such as incomplete information, negative attitudes, and increased anxiety were reported. Strategies for improvement included: the presence of lecturers, clearer objectives, and promoting self-awareness among students. These findings align with existing literature on student-led learning and highlight the need for tailored approaches in nursing education.

Conclusion:

Nursing students' perceptions significantly influence their engagement in student-led class sessions. Understanding their experiences and addressing challenges can enhance the effectiveness of these sessions in nursing education. Future research should explore lecturers' perspectives and feedback mechanisms to further refine student-led teaching approaches.

Keywords: Nursing education, Student-led learning, Qualitative research, Uganda

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Introduction/Background

Student-led class sessions have emerged as a dynamic educational approach wherein students actively participate in learning by influencing content, activities, materials, and pace. This method deviates from traditional didactic lectures, offering students opportunities for independent learning, collaboration, and critical thinking (Julia et al., 2015). Medical education research has shown a growing preference among students for student-led sessions over conventional teaching methods, emphasizing the importance of student engagement and empowerment in the learning process (Manjunath et al., 2015).

In the field of nursing education, where effective communication and critical thinking skills are paramount, the adoption of student-led class sessions holds promise. However, despite the potential benefits, there are challenges associated with implementing this approach effectively. Nursing students, like their counterparts in other disciplines, may exhibit varied perceptions and behaviors during student-led sessions, impacting the overall learning experience (McGlynn & Monica, 2015).

Research indicates that nursing students often struggle to maintain focus and engagement during student-led class sessions, leading to less meaningful learning outcomes and potential implications for patient care (Tremlett et al., 2017). Factors contributing to this phenomenon include fatigue, difficulty understanding peers, negative attitudes toward presenters, and a sense of complacency (Cummings et al., 2019). Additionally, studies have highlighted the prevalence of academic incivility among nursing students, characterized by disruptive behaviors such as apathy, unpreparedness, and lack of participation (Natarajan et al., 2017).

In the African context, where educational practices may vary, understanding students' perceptions and behaviors during student-led class sessions is crucial for improving teaching and learning outcomes. At Uganda Christian University, student-led sessions are integrated into the nursing curriculum alongside lectures, tutorials, and role plays. However, anecdotal evidence suggests that nursing students may not fully engage with these sessions, prompting the need for further investigation (Mukorera & Nyatanga, 2017).

Given the potential impact of student-led class sessions on nursing education and practice, it is essential to explore how nursing students in Uganda perceive and behave during these sessions. By gaining insights into their experiences and challenges, educators can develop strategies to enhance the effectiveness of student-led learning approaches and ultimately improve the quality of nursing education and patient care.

This study aimed to address this gap by examining nursing students' perceptions and behaviors during student-led class sessions at Uganda Christian University. Through qualitative inquiry, we seek to uncover the complexities of student engagement and identify

opportunities for improvement in nursing education practices. By doing so, we hope to contribute valuable insights to the broader discourse on student-centered learning and inform evidence-based teaching strategies in nursing education.

Methods

Study design.

A descriptive qualitative design was employed to gain a comprehensive understanding of nursing students' perceptions and behaviors during student-led class sessions at Uganda Christian University. This design allowed for in-depth exploration of participants' experiences and perspectives, facilitating rich data collection and analysis (Sandelowski, 2000).

Participant selection criteria.

The study targeted direct-entry nursing students pursuing a bachelor's degree in nursing science from the second to fourth year at Uganda Christian University. Students who had completed at least one semester and were not graduates were eligible to participate. Students who were uninvolved or absent during student-led sessions were excluded from the study to ensure data relevance and reliability.

Sampling method.

Convenience sampling was employed to select participants due to the practical constraints of accessing the study population. This method focused on recruiting nursing students from years two, three, and four, considering their exposure to student-led sessions and their potential contributions to the study objectives.

Data Collection.

Data were collected through focus group discussions (FGDs), allowing for interactive dialogue and the exploration of diverse perspectives among participants (Krueger & Casey, 2014). Three focused groups (A, B, and C) were formed, each consisting of five nursing students. FGDs were facilitated by trained researchers using semi-structured interview guides, which ensured consistency in data collection while allowing for flexibility to explore emergent themes (Vaismoradi et al., 2013).

Before the discussions, participants were provided with consent forms outlining the purpose and procedures of the study. They were assured of confidentiality and informed that their participation was voluntary. Each participant was assigned a numerical identifier to maintain anonymity during data analysis and reporting. The FGDs were conducted in a conducive environment, conducive to open dialogue, such as a quiet classroom. Discussions were audio-recorded with participants' consent to ensure accuracy in data capture. Field notes were also taken to supplement audio recordings and capture non-verbal cues and group dynamics.

Data Analysis

In the data analysis process, the researchers transcribed audio recordings of focus group discussions verbatim and reviewed transcripts multiple times to gain a thorough understanding of participants' perspectives (Smith et al., 2015). Furthermore, they systematically assigned codes to segments of text to identify key ideas and participant responses (Saldaña, 2016), and themes and sub-themes emerged through iterative coding and constant comparison (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Similarly, the researcher selected quotable quotes to illustrate each theme, providing concrete examples of participants' perspectives and behaviors (Guest et al., 2012), thereby facilitating the organization and interpretation of data. This rigorous process ensured that findings were derived systematically and accurately from the data, offering valuable insights into nursing students' perceptions and behaviors during student-led class sessions.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from Uganda Christian University and the Department of Nursing. Informed consent was sought from all participants, and their confidentiality and privacy were ensured throughout the study process. Participants were assured of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without consequences. Non-participants were treated fairly and respectfully, with no discrimination based on their decision not to participate.

Results

Beneficial Aspects:

Student-led class sessions were perceived positively by participants, who identified several benefits associated with this teaching approach.

Self-Confidence: Participants expressed that student-led class sessions enhanced their self-confidence by providing opportunities for active participation and public speaking. They felt more comfortable presenting information to their peers, which contributed to their overall confidence levels. For instance, one participant stated, "I feel student-led class sessions are good for students to express themselves and may be perfect for public speaking."

Understanding: Engaging in student-led class sessions encouraged participants to deepen their understanding of the course material. By researching and presenting topics themselves, they gained a more comprehensive understanding of the subject matter. As one participant noted, "When you go deeper, you learn more."

Cooperation: Participants highlighted the importance of cooperation during student-led class sessions. Working together with peers to prepare and deliver presentations promoted teamwork and collaboration. They recognized the need to cooperate to ensure the success of the session. For example, one participant mentioned, "They

help promote cooperation... You have to cooperate whether you want or not."

Non-Beneficial Aspects:

While participants acknowledged the benefits of student-led class sessions, they also identified certain challenges and limitations associated with this approach. *Un-Enriching Information:* Some participants expressed concerns that student-led presentations sometimes lacked depth and quality. They felt that presenters might provide incomplete or misleading information, which could affect the learning experience of their peers. As one participant explained, "They may end up misleading their fellow students in the presentation."

Negative Attitudes: Participants observed negative attitudes among students during student-led class sessions, including biases and judgments towards presenters. This negativity could undermine the effectiveness of the sessions and create a hostile learning environment. One participant shared, "Those who may not have good teaching skills may be undermined by these other colleagues."

Increased Anxiety: Presenters experienced heightened anxiety during student-led sessions, particularly due to the fear of making mistakes or receiving negative feedback. This anxiety could impact their performance and hinder effective communication. A participant described, "You could make a mistake and you can't... they fear... they can't explain themselves."

Strategies for Effective Sessions:

Participants suggested several strategies to enhance the effectiveness of student-led class sessions and address the identified challenges.

Lecturer's Assistance: Participants emphasized the importance of lecturer support during student-led sessions. They believed that lecturers should be present to provide guidance, clarify information, and ensure the accuracy of presentations. As one participant recommended, "The lecturers should be available in class."

Setting Objectives: Participants proposed setting clear objectives for student-led class sessions to guide presenters and ensure that key concepts are covered. They suggested that students should be encouraged to define their objectives and assess their performance accordingly. For instance, one participant stated, "Students should set their own objectives."

Self-Awareness: Participants stressed the importance of self-awareness among presenters during student-led class sessions. They recommended that presenters reflect on their strengths and weaknesses, seek feedback from peers and lecturers, and continuously strive for improvement. A participant suggested, "Students get to know the errors where they should improve."

Appropriate Behaviors

During student-led class sessions, participants exhibited certain behaviors that were conducive to effective learning and collaboration.

Paying More Attention: Participants demonstrated attentiveness to their peers during student-led class sessions, actively listening and engaging with the presentations. They asked questions for clarification, provided feedback, and showed support for presenters. As one participant mentioned, "They will give me much attention."

Inappropriate Behaviors

However, participants also identified behaviors that were detrimental to the learning environment and hindered the success of student-led class sessions.

Paying Less Attention: Some participants admitted to paying less attention during student-led sessions, either due to distractions or disinterest. They acknowledged that this behavior could impact their learning and the overall effectiveness of the sessions. One participant confessed, "Students may not pay attention."

Rejection of Others: Participants observed instances where students rejected or undermined their peers during student-led class sessions. This behavior could create tension and hinder collaboration within the class. A participant noted, "Your friend may be rejecting you."

Student Dominance: Participants expressed concerns about certain students dominating discussions and presentations during student-led class sessions. They felt that this behavior limited the participation of others and disrupted the flow of the session. One participant remarked, "There are people who take over a bigger part than the rest."

These findings highlight the complex dynamics at play during student-led class sessions and underscore the importance of promoting positive behaviors and collaboration among nursing students.

Discussion

In the discussion, we interpret the findings of this study in the context of existing literature, shedding light on the significance of student-led class sessions in nursing education and practice. We explore both the benefits and challenges associated with this educational approach, considering its implications for enhancing student learning and facilitating professional development.

The benefits of student-led class sessions are evident in our findings, aligning with previous research that has highlighted the positive impact of active learning strategies on student engagement and comprehension (McGlynn & Monica, 2015; Julia et al, 2015). Our study underscores the importance of these sessions in fostering self-confidence among nursing students, providing them with opportunities to express themselves and refine their public speaking skills (Shashar et al., 2020). Additionally, student-led class

sessions promote a deeper understanding of course material, as students engage in active discussion and collaborative learning.

However, our findings also reveal several challenges associated with student-led class sessions. Some students perceive these sessions as less enriching, citing concerns about the quality and accuracy of the information presented by their peers (Cummings et al, 2017). Negative attitudes towards student presenters and increased anxiety among participants further detract from the effectiveness of these sessions (Natarajan et al, 2017). Moreover, the dominance of certain students in discussions and the rejection of others creates barriers to active participation and collaboration, hindering the overall learning experience. The participants indicated that to address these challenges and optimize the effectiveness of student-led class sessions, several strategies could be implemented. Firstly, the presence and guidance of lecturers during these sessions are crucial for providing support and ensuring the accuracy of the information presented (Natarajan et al). Lecturers can help students set clear objectives for their presentations and provide feedback to enhance the quality of their delivery. Additionally, promoting self-awareness and encouraging students to reflect on their communication and presentation skills can help mitigate anxiety and improve overall performance.

Limitations

Despite its contributions, this study has some limitations that warrant consideration. The focus on nursing students from a single institution may limit the generalizability of the findings. Future research should explore the perceptions of students from diverse academic backgrounds and institutions to provide a more comprehensive understanding of student-led class sessions. Additionally, further investigation is needed to explore lecturers' perspectives and experiences with this teaching approach, as their input is critical for its successful implementation.

Conclusion

The students' perceptions of student-led class sessions significantly influence their perceived relevance. Therefore, it's crucial to consider suggestions for improving these sessions to ensure that they are relevant. Student-led class sessions offer valuable opportunities for active learning and skill development in nursing education. By addressing the challenges identified in this study and implementing effective strategies for improvement, educators can maximize the benefits of this teaching approach and enhance the educational experience for nursing students.

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PN, VRN, and ABN contributed to the original study, data collection, and analysis.

MMM contributed to research proposal development, data analysis, discussion, and writing of a manuscript.

GN contributed to the writing of this manuscript.

Disclaimer

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Appendix A: Summary of the Data Analysis

Themes	Sub-themes
Beneficial Aspect	Build self-confidence. Promote understanding. Promote cooperation
Non-beneficial Aspect	Un-enriching information Negative attitude Increased anxiety
Strategies for effective student-led class sessions	Lecturer's assistance Setting objectives Self-awareness
Appropriate behaviors Inappropriate behaviors	Paying more attention Paying less attention Rejection of others Student dominancy