

Experiences of Nurse Academics Regarding Nursing Students Research Supervision: A Qualitative Study

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ABSTRACT

Background: Research project supervision has become part and parcel of a university teacher's role amidst other job roles, thereby increasing their workload and stress levels. Consequently, nurse academics have been saddled with the responsibility to ensure that they graduate students who have mastered the art of writing research projects proficiently. Thus, it is important to understand the key aspects of their experiences during research supervision.

Aim: This study explored the experiences of nurse academics as regards supervising nursing students research projects.

Methods: Phenomenological approach which is a qualitative research method was used in the study. The population of the study comprised nurse academics from universities in Southeast Nigeria who have supervised students research work in the last two years and are currently supervising nursing students research work. The study was conducted with 19 lecturers who agreed to participate voluntarily via in-depth interviews.

Results: The themes emerging as a result of the interviews conducted were "research problem formulation is overtly poor", "unsatisfied about students' output" and

"variable but often large supervisees". In the study most participants stated that students' nurses do not know how to formulate research problems and how to present different components of their research proposals. There has also been a disproportion between students' ratio to staff ratio leading to poor supervision.

Conclusion: The study revealed that it is necessary to develop students research writing skills by introducing adequate trainings. Institutional heads should recruit more academics to match the yearly increase in enrolment of students to prevent burnout for lecturers.

Keywords: Nurse Academics, Research Supervision, Experiences, Nursing Students

INTRODUCTION

Research is extremely vital in the academia as it adds to knowledge, improves practice, and builds students' research skills¹. Research supervision has become very necessary for students to achieve higher degree certification². It has been defined as the 'scholarly assistance, advice, teaching, guidance, encouragement, mentoring, tutoring, training, counselling, critiquing and motivation rendered to a student by a supervisor, who is usually a fundus in the

subject under investigation³. Research supervision has also been described as an activity which promotes and develops knowledge sharing, research, and interpersonal skills at the utmost level; hence, advocating students as proficient researchers is usually the prime objective of research supervision¹. In a bid to expand the frontiers of knowledge and create more educated individuals who will have a better understanding of modern innovations in their various fields of study, then research must become a priority in our higher institutions. Nurse academics are usually the designated staffs responsible for supervising and facilitating nursing students' research projects², they need to evolve in such a way as to equip future nurses to work unanimously and efficiently with other health care practitioners in a diversified health care delivery system⁴ and because education in nursing is expanding at a rapid rate, higher demands will invariably be placed on research supervision⁵.

More nurse academics are likely to experience strenuous situations as a good number of students will continue to be assigned to a lecturer for supervision, increasing the university teacher's workload, and yet there are few lecturers to the ever-increasing number of students enrolled into the nursing program. As such, some of these academics are usually not enthusiastic to take on the role of supervision⁶ and the main problem might occur if the teaching credit hour is too weighty beyond their capacity that it affects the time for students' supervision. Every year⁷, the number of students enrolling to become graduate/post-graduate nurses' increases and this takes its toll on the already depreciated numerical strength of the nurse tutors, increasing their stress levels. In one study, participants who were nurse educators lamented over the increasing student to lecturer ratio which does not match the available human resources⁸. The case in Nigeria is not different, the NUC and NMCN benchmark

minimum academic standards (BMAS) for lecturer-student ratio is 1:10, but this has been unavoidably stretched to over 1:100 lecturer-to-student ratios⁹, because of the ever-increasing quest for university education by the populace including the nursing students.

While this continues to be the trend, it must be emphasized that academicians are still expected to provide educational and clinical support to the nursing student⁹ even though they already have over burdening workload and competing demands^{10,3} as they are still expected to teach their assigned courses of which may be more than a handful, conduct compulsory quizzes and examinations which will be marked and recorded, write and publish scholarly articles, attend conference meetings among others. It is also worthy to note that they are expected to grow academically and professionally as the university education system compel them to work hard to remain relevant in their academic career⁹.

Project Supervision in itself could be as challenging as it is motivating. Some students lack knowledge about research methodology¹¹ they do not understand the intricacies of research and so find it very frustrating and tiring as they are at a loss on how to go about their research studies¹², some others lack academic writing skills and are inappropriate in presenting different chapters of their research reports¹³, others depend on their supervisors to suggest research topics for them as they are keen to complete their studies within the time frame stipulated by the university¹⁴ and would not mind researching on anything even when it is way past their interest. In addition, some of these students involve themselves in unethical research practices such as plagiarism, reproducing works by other scholars and presenting them as their own³. All these have an upsetting effect on the supervisor who is expected to guide the student(s) in carrying out their researches and to aid them finish within the stipulated time limit, failure to do so might incur negative implications for both the

supervisor and supervisee. On the brighter side, some students act as motivators to these nurse academics; they are serious minded, spurring them to action and stretching them beyond their capacity, inadvertently giving them more room for growth. And because these students are complex, they challenge nursing academicians to ‘master the skill of facilitating learning and creating the supervision experience as a social learning construct for the student’¹⁵.

When considering key aspects of the experiences as encountered by the research supervisors in the course of supervision, very few studies explore these issues, it appears that the experiences of nurse academics in the course of supervision is an under researched area which clearly warrants further exploration. This study therefore aims to explore the experiences of nurse academics regarding nursing students’ research supervision. It is thought that this study will contribute to the literature in this regard.

Research Questions

The research questions that guided the study are:

1. What are your experiences in students’ formulation of research problem?
2. What are your experiences in students’ development of the research proposal?
3. What is your project-supervision experiences in relation to the number of supervisees?

MATERIALS & METHODS

Research Type

This study adopted a qualitative research design, using the descriptive phenomenological approach. This design was considered suitable for the study because it gives room for participants to describe their experiences in their own words which will aid in obtaining a thorough insight and true reflection of the personal experience of nurse academics as regards to supervising nursing students’ research work.

Population and Sample

The study population consists of nurse academics lecturing in the Faculty of Health Sciences, Department of Nursing at Universities in South East Nigeria. The participants were selected according to a variety of academic ranks, work experiences and specialty degrees based on the judgement of the researchers after they had identified and selected information rich cases related to the phenomenon of interest. A total of 19 participants were interviewed after data saturation had been achieved (the point when no new information or themes are observed in the data). Purposive sampling procedure was used to select participants for the study, this sampling method was considered suitable for the study because it is intentional selection of informants who are especially knowledgeable about or experienced with the phenomenon of interest and are able to elucidate a specific theme, concept, or phenomenon^{16,17}.

Ethical Consideration

The study was conducted in accordance with the principles stated in the declaration of Helsinki. Approval for the conduct of the study was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee of the University of Nigeria Teaching Hospital, Ituku Ozalla who issued an Ethical Clearance Certificate with reference number; UNTH/CSA/329/VOL.5 after ensuring that ethical standards will be observed during the study. The aims of the study and its voluntary nature were explained to the participants who gave a verbal informed consent before each interview. Confidentiality was ensured by using ‘participant 1, 2, 3 etc. and not their names, in order to maintain anonymity and confidentiality.

Data Collection Process

Data were collected via the use of a semi-structured in-depth interview format at chosen venues free from disturbances, commotions and intrusions. Prior to the

interview, a questionnaire was used to obtain information on the demographic characteristics of the participants (table 1). The interview guide was divided into sections, questions and follow-up questions/probes that were guided by the study's research questions. English language was the preferred means of communication and all interactions were

recorded on an audio tape recorder after obtaining permissions from the participants. Fictitious names in the form of mock initials were used to represent the recruited participants so as to maintain anonymity. The interview was carried out on a one-on-one basis which lasted for approximately 40-60 minutes, with a mean duration of 50 minutes.

Table 1: Showing demographic variables of study participant. n = 19

	Variables	N	%
Age in Years	20 -30	2	10.5
	31-40	5	26.3
	41- 50	2	10.5
	51- 60	7	36.9
	≥ 61	3	15.8
Gender	Male	5	26.3
	Female	14	73.7
Marital Status	Married	16	84.2
	Single	2	10.5
	Widowed	1	5.3
Years of Working Experience	1- 10	11	57.9
	11-20	4	21.0
	21 - 30	3	15.8
	≥ 31	1	5.3
Occupational Status	Lecturer 1	9	47.4
	Lecturer 11	3	15.8
	Senior lecturer	4	21.0
	Professor	3	15.8

Data Analysis

At the end of each interview, two of the researchers began transcribing the audio tape recordings of the interview on a word document and saved it on a pass worded computer. After which, all 4 researchers combined to analyze and critically review the data. All authors agreed with the results as there was no major disagreement. The participants' words were transcribed verbatim, with no alterations being made to their comments.

The data were analyzed following the seven steps of Colaizzi's method of qualitative content analysis and it began as soon as the first interview was completed. A qualitative content analysis approach involves reading

and re-reading transcripts, looking for similarities and differences that enable the researcher to develop themes and categories¹⁸. It is a distinctive seven step process which provides a rigorous analysis, with each step staying close to the data making the end result a concise yet all-encompassing description of the phenomenon under study, validated by the participants that created it¹⁹.

RESULT

Three (3) major themes and eight (8) sub-themes were abstracted from the participants' experiences as shown in table 2.

Table 2: Thematic summary of the responses

SN	Theme	Sub-theme
1	Research Problem formulation is overtly poor	Formulating a research problem is a major challenge
		Develop a good researchable topic
		Ideal number of research topic
		Overcome research problem challenge
2	Unsatisfied about students' output	Lack of research proposal skills
		Measures to attain research proposal skills
3	Variable but often large supervisees	Number of students per lecturer is relative
		Supervisors suffer negative impacts on numerous supervisees

Theme 1: Research Problem Formulation is Overtly Poor: This theme emerged with four sub-themes namely: formulating research problem is a major challenge, develop a good researchable topic, ideal number of research topic and overcome research problem challenges. These sub-themes illuminate the participant's experiences with formulation of research problem.

Sub-theme 1: Formulating Research Problem is a Major Challenge: This sub-theme reveals a general knowledge paucity toward formulating a researchable problem, as getting a research problem to study was a major challenge for most students, some students take up predetermined topics to avoid formulating their own topic and most often all these are stemmed from lack of knowledge.

On the average most students don't know what to do and how to formulate research problems, but I shouldn't be the one formulating their problems for them. But when some of them show interest in a topic and I see that the topic is trendy, I can reframe it so it becomes a research problem (participant 2).

My experiences with students, is that they don't like formulating. They don't really like identifying a problem unless I insist, most of them have already predetermined topics they want to write and those topics are gotten from previous research projects and also, I got to find out that there are some websites, online websites now that exist, where you can pay and get a topic and introduction and more pay for full research (participant 6).

I find out that some of them do not like thinking, they don't formulate their research problems based on real need. Most times, these days' students just go and carry an already completed project that they feel is easy and bring it like that but I try to tell them that you have to find out something new, what you can add, what you want to change as a student and as a researcher and it has to be your intellectual property. This guides the students in their selection of a research topic (participant 7).

Sub-theme 2: Develop a Good Researchable Topic: This sub-theme marked participants experience in criteria they look out for before approving a research topic to their supervisees. Participants disclosed that it ranges from available time, available literatures, dependent and independent variables, scope of the study, dogma guiding the institution and stated objectives.

Emm, often a time I look at what is viable, what we can really work on and given the time available, you don't pick a topic that will take too long, it shouldn't be ambiguous. Looking at the time provided it may not be possible to conduct some research (participant 8).

I look at the topic whether the topic is researchable, whether the topic is current, not something somebody did in the 1960s, and you can imagine somebody researching on the use of analog phone. I also consider whether there are literatures supporting the research topic (participant 10).

I look at the variables; the measurable variables, the independent and dependent

variables, the outcome of effect, the scope of study, because if these variables are not present, I do not think there is anything we are doing with research (participant 9).

One other thing I do is when you select a particular topic, I will like you to design your objectives for writing it and that will help the student in the first place to say oh this is not good enough before meeting me. So, when the student comes with the objective for the study, then it will help both parties to appreciate why it should be this and not the other (participant 8).

Sub-theme 3: Ideal Number of Research Topic:

This subtheme illuminates' participants experience on the ideal number of topics students are supposed to present to their supervisors for approval. Majority of the participants affirmed three topics is ideal with an exception of one participant. Institutional policies have also been a determining factor on choosing a research problem

It depends on the institutional policy. Most institutions will, like where I lecture, we have a research committee and it is the responsibility of the research committee to tell the students to submit three topics. Then each student will submit three topics in a file and then the research committee goes through the topics and approve a topic for the student. If the supervisor has a problem with the research topic, he can reconstruct the research topic with the approval of the chairman of the research committee (participant 13)

Usually 3, because 3 is a good number. If I allow a longer list, I end up getting all sort of things so I limit them (participant 8).

I expect them to bring three, and also bring the objectives along. Because bringing objectives helps you to know where they are going to (participant 10).

I expect one! This is because students usually bring a 'shopping list'. Eheh now (laughs), more options show that you have no focus, you are just gambling. If a student has been working, she should be different from the next student, therefore they should

already have an area of interest that stimulates them, this shows that they are ready to take off and graduate (participant 11).

Sub-theme 4: Overcome Research Problem Challenge:

Participants revealed challenges encountered by students while trying to make a choice of research problem and strategies to overcoming challenges posed.

Ahhh, you know, sometimes, when the idea for research problems come, they may not come ready-made. A student may have an idea of what he or she wants to do, but she or he, as the case may be, may not have been able to structure it well, that is where I come in to help them (participant 13)

I am aware that student do not like choosing a research topic, maybe due to lack of knowledge and moreover most of them are novice when it comes to research. So, if they are not forthcoming with their topics I usually go into my library and pick one then rephrase it.

If they are interested, they can use it (participant 19).

I usually ask them about their interests, and when they indicate them, I advise them to look up what others have written on that field and download four or five full text journal publications in the chosen field. Usually, they are able to come up with something after looking at it critically (participant 11).

Theme 2: Unsatisfied about Students

Output: This theme revealed participants experience with each component of research proposal. Two sub-themes were elicited namely: Lack of research proposal skills and measures to attain research proposal skills.

Sub-theme 1: Lack of Research Proposal

Skills: This sub-theme revealed participants experience with students' research proposal writing. Most research participants' expressed dissatisfaction over student's research proposals. Some

disclosed that they resorted to teaching the basics initially because students lack appropriate research knowledge and skills in writing.

The question to be considered is if the students understand what a proposal is, at times I ask them to go and write and come up with a proposal based on the topic they submitted, they come back and I realize they don't even understand what it is. That understanding is not there as far as research is concerned (participant 5).

Hmm, I don't know... the first draft is usually poorly written. I think a lot of factors, contributing factors.... Most of them maybe at the point of writing have not really gone through their research process. They've not been taught, so their proposals are not well written, a lot of people tend to copy and paste and they don't do in-text citation. In fact, they don't really know what to do. Do you understand, they keep grappling and making a lot of mistakes (participant 16).

So normally what I do is as soon as they assign a new set of supervisees, I'll contact them and arrange for a meeting. Normally when they give me supervisees, I bring them together and run through each of those sections, what is expected; for instance, Introductions, this is what you're expected to do in an introduction (participant 5).

Sub-theme 2: Measures to Attain Research Proposal Skills: This sub-theme illuminates participant's effort to ensure acquisition of research skills.

I find out that some students already have an inbuilt phobia for their lecturers because sometimes they feel like my project may not be up to date or up to standard, you know...and that makes them afraid. Many times, I have to make them relax and adjust so that I can be able to do an effective supervision. So, I remind them that I am their guide on this research project path (participant 7).

Although students have taken research courses, but when it comes to writing and producing the actual research, there is a

problem. Some do not know how to review, they just copy what they download online without acknowledgement, so I teach them on how to get relevant information, I normally show them, this is how you sought for materials, this is how you write, I tell them how to gather information from different sources because you see students, they'll come and in one page, I observed that they copied it from one source and added no references. Do you understand... I try to tell them how to vary their information from different sources, so that their work isn't just copy and paste. For some of them I have to basically guide and direct them on how to go about in order for me to get something that is reasonable for that stage, that's it (participant 19).

Definitely. Nobody can overemphasize the importance of training, creating awareness and orientation. Most times when students are writing this project, they don't have a grasp of what the research proposal is all about. Like I said earlier, some students see this research as fulfilment of all righteousness, let me just graduate but when they are given proper orientation of the basis of what a research project should be like and aimed at doing, proffering solutions to identified problems...you know.... a lot of students have written projects before but there are basic things about project that they don't know about, they may have even defended and graduated but still lack the basics. Some of my students cannot even differentiate between broad and specific objectives yet they have written project. It is like this because nobody has given them a prior orientation before they started writing (participant 7).

My relationship is quite cordial; not very formalized. I will rather call it a mentor-mentee relationship. I like to deal with people who are ready to work. I also suggest peer mentorship, I pair them in groups so others will critic, contribute and enrich the work and make it better. But I don't like anyone who tries to exploit the situation (participant 11).

Theme 3: Variable but Often Large Supervisees:

This theme emerged with two sub-themes namely: 'Number of students per lecturer is relative and Supervisors suffer negative impacts on numerous supervisees'. These sub-themes illuminate participants' experiences with numbers of assigned supervisees as well as impact on the lecturers.

Sub- theme 1: Number of Students Per Lecturer is Relative:

This subtheme discloses supervisors view on the maximum number of supervisees appropriate for a nurse-lecturer to supervise. Majority stated that an average of 4 to 5 supervisees per supervisor should be the ideal but the yearly increase in the number of students enrolled to study Nursing each year, defeats the purpose.

Number is relative. Well, a lot depends on available time, if there are enough supervisors and students can be thinned out, 4 is good enough but it is hectic because the number of students increase each year (participant 8).

For me at least for a session, no lecturer should be supervising more than 5 supervisees. I found out that when a nurse lecturer has too many supervisees, it will make her pay little attention to each of them because there are a lot of them. Reading the project work is not an easy task, because it takes time, energy and concentration to detect the things that should not be there and add the things that should be there so when they are so much, I won't give them the best supervision (participant 7).

Certainly, I will supervise better if they were fewer because the pressure on me is reduced, the workload is reduced, the interaction is improved, and the relationship is enhanced.... But the impact is so much when they are too many, I can't even talk about the drain on my physical health and all that (participant 3).

Sub-theme 2: Supervisors Suffer Negative Impacts on Numerous

Supervisees: This sub-theme illuminates what study participants experience in reference to number of students supervised. Most of them confessed to being less efficient while others make-up for the increased number of students by using unofficial period such as the home front to review students' projects.

Really, I know that I feel uncomfortable seeing a lot of students, If I see that six persons are waiting for me, I may not go into details because I am trying to also consider other things that I have, and even other things the students may have. So, I think the larger the number the less efficient that supervisor- student relationship is (participant 4).

When they are many, the work will not be done very well because it is not only supervision I am doing, I teach, I give exams, I give continuous assessment, I mark them, I make my results, I have to do my own work as a lecturer, I am also doing researches, publications, write-ups and other things in the department that is been assigned to me. So, the students' supervision is not the only thing I am doing, I have a whole lot of other things to do (participant 2).

It is not easy with our workload; they have killed us. Hmm, they have killed us. You can imagine, I just came out from 9 supervisees and I'm told that I have 15 now. They have finished us (participant 3).

Unfortunately, work hours are not a good time to do the project. It's always at home. So, because it is at home, I find out that I do not have time of my own. Most of the time I like to do my personal things, I use it in reading the students project, so it's really a difficult thing. The number is large, and is so inconveniencing, particularly, when I have students that are not doing well, that are showing me, by way of what they are writing that they are not serious (participant 1).

Hmm, my dear o, considering the number of the supervisees assigned to me, I'll say it's a nightmare because the number is

large. I find out that round the clock, I always have outstanding project work to do, which is so challenging. Well, all I need to do is to create time, forgo some personal things I need to do maybe where to go, pay visit, no time for relaxation, I sleep late or wake very early and so on to make sure that I cover those things, but there's rarely no week that will pass that I don't have at least five students project waiting for me, no matter how hard or how fast I like to work (participant 19).

DISCUSSION

First and foremost, before any research can be carried out, there must be an identified problem, an issue that has been discovered and needs to be addressed or looked into. Identifying a research problem has been unanimously agreed by participants in this study as a major challenge experienced by students, other studies have shared same fate^{3,21,22}. There are studies where students expected supervisors to suggest research topics for them¹⁴. Participants stated that most students are marked with utmost confusion as to how to go about this hurdle, some of them do not know what a research problem is or how it can be stated, some do not know what to study or what problem they have identified. This is in congruence with Qasem and Zayid²² study where it was stated that one of the common challenge and difficulties students faced when writing their project was the difficulty in deciding a topic for the research, they end up with broad and unclear topics with no focused content while other researches reveal inability to create good researchable topics^{3,23}. Without adequately defining the problem, students may find themselves going off on a 'goose chase' to tackle a vague phenomenon, trying to deal with symptoms rather than root causes and wasting time, becoming frustrated or even making the actual problem worse²⁴. Another interesting point noted by participants is that most students already have predetermined topics gotten from other students' previous research projects,

while others patronize some fraudulent online websites where one can pay purchase a full research work. This affirms students' preference for short cuts and easy way out as they have little or no zeal to carry out real researches. This is in conformity with Mafa and Mapolisa³ study where they revealed that students can't craft research topics or develop proposals rather, they involve themselves in plagiarism, reproducing other persons work. Participants in this study noted that when they realize that the student have a keen interest in a particular topic which happens to be trendy, they would assist in reframing it so it becomes a researchable problem. This does not come as a surprise, the supervisor ought to assist the student in gaining clarity of the topic and later draw back to allow the student carry out the research²⁵. Enquiries eliciting what factors one would put into consideration before approving a research topic revealed that time factor is an important variable to consider, understanding that some projects may be really time consuming and students may not have such liberties as they are constrained to finish within a particular time frame, supervisors tend to look at what is viable, what quality work can be produced given the time available. This is being supported by Taylor and Beasley²⁶, in their 'handbook for doctoral supervision', one of the ways they described an effective supervisor is someone who assists their students complete their project on time and yet produce a high-quality thesis. Other factors to be considered were financial resources as some projects may be really capital intensive and most students carry out these researches out of their pockets without any support from any foundation or organization, a view that has being shared by some authors^{21,27}. Other participants have stated that they judge the research topic, whether it is researchable, not ambiguous, current and not some topic that has become obsolete and irrelevant. Literatures supporting the research topic has also been implicated as a criterion, one

would not want to delve into a study where there would be no evidence supporting or refuting their studies. Independent and dependent variables, scope of the study, dogma guiding the institution and stated objectives were extra criteria that was mentioned. As regards the number of research topics to be submitted for approval, majority of the participants affirm three topics to be presented by each student initially because they believe that a longer list would be too cumbersome. Others insist on the students bringing the objectives alongside the topics because that would serve as a pointer for a clearer picture. Searching existing literatures, two to three research topics of the student's interest has been advocated²⁸. Some participants confessed to cutting the chase of waiting for students to submit researchable topics and would rather give the students their own preferred topic to work on, this occurs most of the time if the supervisor is an expert in that field or has a vested interest in that project²⁹. This also occurs in cases where the students' interests align with theirs probably in cases where the supervisor wants the work published or presented in a conference etc. This is not startling as joint publication with students serves as motivation to supervise as seen in Askew et al⁶. This has led other students in research carried out by Davis³⁰, to see their supervisors as being more interested in their work for the purpose of adding publications to their own curriculum vitae other than in the student's progress.

Unsatisfied about students' output was the theme which was elicited from participants' experiences with each component of research proposal. Research proposal usually entails chapters one to three of a research project work in this context. In some institutions, the student is mandated to make a proposal before faculty members to enable them get feedbacks and suggestions from the senior counterparts which will aid their work as they go out into the field to collect data. Even though it is the duty of the research supervisor to

guide and support the student through their research work, the onus lies on the student to ensure that they create a good work. According to Polonski²⁹, students who expect a supervisor to guide their every step and who have no desire to actively participate in the learning process will usually receive less supervisory input. Participants revealed in this study that although some students are aware that proposal entails chapter one to three, they do not have the understanding, knowledge or skills to come up with a masterpiece. Further results review that the first draft is usually poorly written, a lot of students tend to copy and paste and yet don't do in-text citation, they keep grappling and making a lot of mistakes. This is not far-fetched from Komba's¹³ result, students have been expressed to have very poor writing skills and present the various chapters of their research work wrongly. Findings from Qasem and Zayid²² research showed that students have difficulty understanding research methodology, they experience problems reporting the literature review or even identifying clearly relevant literature review and they face challenges in writing research. This may be as a result of overwhelming literature out there, making them struggle to read through all the information to pinpoint secondary data that will be meaningful to their own study²¹ while others experience this difficulty according to Abiddin et al³¹ because they are not familiar with the research topic and some lack knowledge about the research methodology. It is the duty of the research supervisor to assist students imbibe skills in research writing and reduce the inbuilt phobia for their lecturers because they may feel that their project work is not up to standard and that scares them. Research from Henderson et al³² admonishes nursing faculties to create a compassionate learning environment so as to tackle the high attrition rates of nurses due to lack of self-confidence in facing their lecturers. Notwithstanding, participants noted that they are aware of students' tension as they

struggle to face them with their poorly written piece, especially during the first attempt yet they focus on building a mentor-mentee relationship, guidance, training and orientation. In addition, peer mentorship has also showed great prospects as students who are paired in groups criticize themselves thereby enriching the work and making it better.

Dwelling on participants' experiences on what the ideal number of supervisees ought to be as well as the impact on the lecturers, participants revealed that there are no hard and fast rule on the number of students to be assigned, the maximum number is relative, it all depends on students' population admitted that year and the available supervisors. If there are few supervisors and many students, supervisors have no choice but to have many supervisees. However, there have been complaints of allegedly yearly increase in admission whereas the staff ratio is not increasing causing lots of strain on the available lecturers. This case is not far-fetched from Askew's⁶ study, there have been a notable increase in the enrolment of students into higher institutions, making supervision increasingly becoming part of a university's teacher workload. Majority of the participants suggested that an average number of 4 to 5 students per research supervisor is perfect but this has never been the case. Some of them claimed to have just concluded supervising 9 students each and yet have just been assigned 15 new students for the current session. This appalling number sure do have negative impacts. Dwelling on the impact this numbers have on the supervision process; participants have confessed to supervising poorly and less strictly. Everyone had unanimously agreed that fewer supervisees assigned to supervisors help to make quality work, reduces academic stress and lecturers can have enough time for each student. But when the number is over whelming, supervisors begin to manage the time because they have other commitments to attend to as supervision is not the only job

they do, and at this rate, it is difficult to maintain an efficient supervisor-supervisee relationship as there are other demanding roles of academics¹⁵. A participant complained of the drain this excessive numbers have had on her physical health, revealing that when there are fewer students to supervise, the pressure is reduced, the workload is reduced, the interaction is improved, and the relationship is enhanced. Notwithstanding, participants have stated that despite the large number, they still try to do their best for each student and don't allow any student suffer for the failed system. To make up for the increased number of students, supervisors have been noted to pay the price by using unofficial periods such as the home fronts to read students project, personal desires such as relaxation or visitation time has been forfeited, showing the level of sacrifices lecturers make to ensure students turn out well.

CONCLUSION

This study explored the experiences of nurse academics regarding nursing students research supervision. It revealed that student nurses: [1] do not know how to formulate research problems, [2] lack adequate knowledge and skill about research methodology and how to present different components of their research proposals, [3] yearly increase in admission as opposed to staff ratio have resulted to poorly supervised work and an inefficient supervisor-supervisee relationship. The findings suggest further training to be instituted for students to equip them better to write their research project. Institutional heads should also recruit more academics to match the yearly increase in enrolment of students so as to avoid burnout for lecturers from supervising too many students at a time.

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