



# The role of supervision in acquisition of clinical skills among nursing and midwifery students: A literature review

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## Abstract

Nursing and midwifery are skill based professions. Students are expected to have acquired their professional skills on graduation and be able to offer quality care. Several factors have been seen to influence the process of acquisition of skills during clinical placement and one of them being clinical supervision. The aim of the review was to determine the role of clinical Supervision in acquisition of skills among Nursing and Midwifery Students. A search of the literature regarding supervision and acquisition of skills was undertaken using CINAHL, PubMed, Science Direct, Hinari, EBSCO Host Research, Biomed central, Cochrane Review and Google scholar databases using keywords: “clinical supervision” AND “acquisition of skills” “nursing and midwifery Students . The search was limited to English full-length research articles in peer-reviewed journals from the year 2005 to 2017 inclusive. A total of 18 articles that met the criteria were included in this review. From the search conducted using the search terms described above, it yielded several articles and abstracts (223 articles and abstracts) that were focusing on clinical supervision in general and also the supervision models. However eighteen articles that were close to the review topic and met the inclusion criteria were included in the review. From the reviewed article four themes emerged; Provides support and professional socialisation, Improves interpersonal and communication skills, Increases students’ opportunities and confidence in learning and Increases students’ reflective thinking, self-evaluation and decision making. There has been a lot of discussion concerning clinical supervision for nursing and midwifery students during clinical placement for them to learn and differing views from both the learners, clinical staff and educators. The article included in the review has highlighted several views regarding the role supervision plays in the process of acquiring skills. Although there are other factors that influence acquisition of skills, clinical supervision has an important role in helping students learn and become competent in those skills required for their professional practice. The reviewers have also come to conclusion that clinical supervision regardless of the model used still has an important role with regard to acquisition of clinical skill by students. The highlighted themes are a learning point for some countries to strengthen supervision strategies so that they yield intended outcomes for students’ learning.

**Keywords:** Clinical supervision, Nursing student, Midwifery students, Skills acquisition.

## INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Although nursing midwifery education comprises both theory and practical, the application of theory is within the clinical environment where the students learn the art of midwifery (Ebert et al., 2016). Clinical placements are an essential educational component to undergraduate nursing and midwifery students' development as these provide an invaluable opportunity for the learners to acquire and develop skills, tacit knowledge, demonstrate conceptual understanding, and professional competency.

Acquiring of the clinical skill is a process and is an important part of nursing and midwifery education and practice. These clinical skills underpin the professional practice for nurses and midwives. These skills represent a set of knowledge and practices which aim to develop the competences necessary for the proper professional practice and these can include but not limited to; communication, psychomotor, listening etc. Becoming competent in these essential skills is mandatory for safe and effective practice (Bloomfield et al., 2008 )The acquisition of clinical skills required for successful practice

and learning however, poses a challenge to both the learner and the teacher as there are several factors that affect the process (Bloomfield et al., 2008; Borneuf and Haigh, 2010). High quality, supportive practice learning experiences are crucial for ensuring that student nurses and midwives become competent practitioners who have skill and are fit for practice. Norman et al. (2000) notes that the clinical learning environment facilitates or hinders the process of acquiring the professional skills.

Acquisition of skills to a level of proficiency has a number of challenges and requires more than just a clinical placement but several other factors influence learning and acquisition of skills to proficiency level during clinical placement (Felton and Royal, 2015; Lake and Hamdorf, 2004). Therefore, the process of integrating knowledge, skill and communication is a complex one. It is influenced by several factors including poor practice students observe during placement and support received including supervision.

Literature has shown that effective clinical placement requires supervision and support to students to facilitate professional development (Ebert et al., 2016). The process of supervision ensures that quality nurses and midwives graduate as professionals (Laitila et al., 2007). Although there are different opinions regarding supervision of students, Tiwaken et al. (2015) noted that effective supervision by clinical teachers in clinical environment is vital for students learning.

According to Carver et al. (2014) clinical supervision is a process of supporting and learning which enables the students to develop their knowledge and competence for their own practice, and enhance client protection and safety of care in complex clinical situations. The Health Workforce Australia (2010) also defined clinical supervision as the “(oversight – either direct or indirect – by a clinical supervisor of professional procedures and/or processes performed by students)”. This therefore means that there is another individual professional who is able to direct the learner on how to learn the particular skill. With all the factors influencing students’ acquisition of skills, the question therefore is “(what role does supervision of students play during the learning process of students during clinical placement?)”

#### Aim of the review

The aim of the review was to determine the role of clinical Supervision in acquisition of competences among Nursing and Midwifery Students.

## METHODS

#### Search Strategy

A search of the literature regarding supervision and

acquisition of skills was undertaken using CINAHL, PubMed, Science Direct, Hinari, EBSCO Host Research, Biomed central, Cochrane Review and Google scholar databases using keywords: “clinical supervision” and “acquisition of skills” “Nursing and Midwifery Students”. The search was limited to English full-length research articles in peer-reviewed journals from the year 2005 to 2017 inclusive. The inclusion criteria considered both nursing and midwifery research articles that examined clinical supervision and or acquisition of skills in nursing and midwifery students in any type of health care setting. These studies were included in the review regardless of the methodology (qualitative and quantitative). The exclusion criteria for this literature review included any research that described clinical supervision of non-nursing and midwifery students. The reviewer also came across literature regarding supervision of clinical staff by allocated senior supervisor, however as this was not the focus but students, such articles were excluded.

## RESULTS

An initial search brought out a total of 223 articles and abstracts with words related to the review topic and the search terms. These were skimmed thoroughly to determine whether they were relevant to the review topic and 25 articles were selected based on the topic of review. However, after reading through the articles only eighteen articles (Table 1) have been included in the review as they met the inclusion criteria. Despite that there is a lot of literature regarding general student supervision and different models being used, this literature search has demonstrated that there appears to be little literature that is directly relating supervision of students to acquisition of skills especially to nursing and midwifery students.

Following the review of the articles that have been included, some major concepts/themes emerged from the articles regarding the role clinical supervision plays to students learning and acquisition of skills. The following are some of the concepts/themes that emerged; Provides support and professional socialisation, Improves interpersonal and communication skills, Increases students’ opportunities and confidence in learning and Increases students’ reflective thinking, self-evaluation and decision making.

## DISCUSSION

A limitation to this study is the lack of articles that are directly relating supervision to acquisition. However from the literature reviewed, it is evidently clear that acquiring clinical skill require a supportive environment for students in the clinical environment because of the complexity and challenging nature of skills acquisition (Dehghani et al., 2016; Holst and Horberg, 2013; Amsrud et al., 2015; Manninen et al., 2015; Crafoord and Fagardahl, 2016).

**Table 1.** Summary of reviewed literature

	<b>Author (s)</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Methods</b>	<b>Conclusions</b>
1.	Netshandama et al. (2017)	Clinical Supervision as an Integral Part in Training for Bridging Course Learners at Selected Hospitals of Vhembe District, Limpopo Province, South Africa	Qualitative, exploratory, descriptive design 28 Second year learners.	Clinical supervision is regarded as a foundation for nursing practice as along as those tasked with the duty are able to prioritise students learning.
2.	McKeller and Graham (2017)	A review of the literature to inform a best practice clinical supervision model for midwifery students in Australia	Review of literature 23 articles	It is important to have a best practice model of clinical supervision for midwifery education in order to have midwifery graduates who are fit for practice
3.	Jolstad et al. (2017)	Clinical Supervision and Non-Technical Professional Development Skills in the Context of Patient Safety—The Views of Nurse Specialist Students.	Descriptive-correlational design 56 nurse specialist students	Clinical Supervision is crucial for development of non-technical skills and patient safety competencies among NSS
4.	Crafoord and Fagardah (2016)	Clinical supervision in perioperative nursing education in Sweden –a questionnaire study	Questionnaire survey 49 newly graduated	Responses indicate that student had preceptors and being were given opportunities to practice in the during their placement contributing to the process of acquiring the skills
5.	Russell et al. (2016)	The art of clinical supervision: Its development and descriptive mixed method review.	Descriptive Study with mixed methods data collection and analysis 198 participants	The research study confirmed the success of the program, and the program continues to provide learning opportunities for all health professionals in Western Australia
6.	Habimana et al. (2016)	Clinical supervision of nursing students: challenges and alternatives.	Concept paper	Clinical supervision has many challenges to both students and staff. However, it is helpful in developing and improving students experience in the clinical environment
7.	Dehghani et al. (2015)	Impact of clinical supervision on field training of nursing students at Urmia University of Medical Sciences	Experimental study 32 nursing students	The Clinical supervision process accords learners to have a better communication and cooperation with each other. Students' confidence and understanding increases and the amount of learning in practical skills is more than just the routine clinical training.
8.	Amsrud et al. (2015)	The influence of clinical supervision and its potential for enhancing patient safety-Undergraduate nursing students' views	Descriptive-correlational design 66 nursing students	Students reported increased awareness and a strong improvement in interpersonal, professional and communication skills. Findings also show potential of clinical supervision to contribute to personal growth and a caring attitude towards patients, thereby strengthening the development of skills essential for patient safety care. Students' clinical placement and clinical supervision can help achieve the overall aim of nursing education
9.	Lyberg et al. (2015)	Evaluation Nursing Students' Views of Improved Competence Development after Clinical Supervision: An Educative Approach to the WHO Patient Safety Model	Cross-sectional study design 66 second level and 59 third level BSN students	There was improved development after clinical supervision. Competence was increased through improved care skills and professional skills
10.	Manninen et al. (2015)	Supervisors' pedagogical role at a clinical education ward – an ethnographic study	Ethnographic 5 supervisors 10 patients 11 students	Having supervisors is appreciated by the students as it enhances the students' thinking and reflecting on patient care and on their own learning, as well as further developing their existing knowledge and skills
11.	Holst and Horberg (2013)	Students learning in clinical practice, supervised in pairs of students – a phenomenological study	Phenomenology -12 nursing students	Supervising in pair of students is of great importance for students' learning

12.	Franklin (2013)	Clinical supervision in undergraduate nursing students: A review of the literature.	Literature review 27 articles	Despite the fact that there are several models of clinical supervision, it is important in clinical education environment to ensure that students are adequately supported and prepared for the transition to new graduate nurses
13.	Kaphagaweni and Useh (2013)	Analysis of nursing students learning experiences in clinical practice: Literature Review	Literature Review 58 studies	Clinical supervision plays an important role in the facilitating learning through provision of opportunities by the supervisors and a conducive environment for learning.
14.	Watson et al. (2013)	Clinical supervision for novice millennial nurses in the perinatal setting: The need for generational sensitivity	Focus group discussion Two focus group discussion	This study highlights some challenges when clinical supervision was introduced in a Canadian perinatal setting. An informal, flexible approach to new nursing graduates, based on generational sensitivity, is suggested to provide the support needed to engage novice nurses and promote reflection in the first year of professional practice.
15.	Brunero and Stein-Parbury (2011)	The effectiveness of clinical supervision in nursing: an evidenced based literature review.	Literature review 22 studies	There is available evidence in nursing literature that showing that clinical supervision Restorative, normative and formative function. Provides peer support and relieves stress. (Restorative), promoting professional accountability (Normative) and skills and knowledge development (Formative)
16.	Severinsson and Sand (2010)	Evaluation of the Clinical Supervision and Professional Development of Student Nurses.	Cross sectional study 147 nursing students	Clinical supervision strongly influences the student nurses' development of a professional identity, enhancing decision-making ability and personal growth. However, development of documentation skills should include a greater level of user involvement.
17.	Echternacht and Youngs (2008)	Clinical supervision: Instructional strategy in the development of psychiatric skills.		Clinical supervision provides the opportunity for students and nursing educators to engage in active reflection on experiential learning experiences. Furthermore, clinical experience without appropriate clinical supervision does not assure development of essential psychiatric nursing skills. It allows student and instructor to reexamine recent experiences with actual patients and fine-tune clinical skills. Clinical supervision provides the opportunity to enhance student clinical skills based on faculty feedback regarding student performance. As clinical competencies develop, a student becomes more confident in the ability to provide clinical care. A student who sees the clinical supervision experience as beneficial is likely to seek out clinical supervision opportunities in future practice settings.
18.	Laitila et al. (2007)	Nursing students in clinical practice – Developing a model for clinical supervision	Literature review 27 studies and four focus group discussions	Clinical supervision strengthens the development of Professional identity and supports the socialisation process of the profession. Clinical supervision also advances positive attitudes towards Professional development and assists in the realization of the need for lifelong learning. Clinical Supervision contributes to the recognition of the essential elements of nursing and nursing environment. Finally, it promotes the development of Self-evaluation and presents ideas how to develop it.

Despite the fact that there are other factors that have been documented to influence the process of skills acquisition, supervision has been seen to be very important (Rhodes et al., 2011; Mwale and Kalawa, 2015). Supervision has been seen to play an important role in the learning of students during clinical placement. The following discussion will focus on the identified concepts/themes.

#### **Provides Support and Professional Socialisation**

According to the review, Clinical supervision is important in

students' learning during clinical placement. One of the findings is that clinical supervision provides a form of support which students appreciate during the learning (Franklin, 2013; Habimana et al., 2016; Mafumo et al., 2017; Brunero and Stein-Parbury, 2011). Research evidence has shown that students perform and learn better in the clinical environment if they have support from people (Elcigil and Sari, 2007). Based on the definition of clinical supervision, this support may not necessarily be from the educators but also from senior peers who

may be more knowledgeable than them. Bourgeois et al. (2011) notes that *“peer supervision and support provides students an opportunity to discuss their practice and share knowledge and skills. Lack of support has shown to be bring stress and tension among students which eventually has an effect on the student learning”*

When they are given the required support, students are being able to translate their theoretical knowledge and integrate it into practice. Brunero and Stein-Parbury (2011) in their review identified the three functions according to Proctor’s model which include support and stress relief (Restorative), promoting professional accountability (Normative) and skill and knowledge development (Formative). According to Mwale and Kalawa (2016) skills acquisition can only be accomplished when there is adequate student nurses support and guidance by senior in the clinical learning environments. It is therefore this support and experiences that students receive that help them being socialized in the profession.

#### **Improves Interpersonal and Communication Skills**

In nursing and midwifery education and practice, interpersonal relationships and communication with patients and other members of the health care is vital (Sani et al., 2013). It is vital for both learners to learn the skills and for supervisors and practitioners to provide quality care. It enhances critical thinking and problem solving techniques. According to the reviewed articles (Amsrud et al., 2015; Dahghani et al., 2015; Lyberg et al., 2015; Russell et al., 2016), clinical supervision to students increases their awareness and improves their interpersonal, professional and communication skills which are essential to patient safety. It gives an opportunity to the students to communicate effectively with their peers and supervisors during their learning process and thereby support each other. Based on this finding, students learn these from the supervisor through communication and constructive feedback.

#### **Increases Student’s Opportunities and Confidence in Learning**

Another finding from the review regarding the role of supervision is skills acquisition is increasing opportunities for students to learn and therefore build their confidence to learn and practice the required skills (Holst and Horberg, 2013; Dehghan et al., 2015; Craford and Fagardahl, 2016; Echternacht and Young, 2008). When students are given enough opportunities during practice by their supervisors they develop confidence to try out the skills and eventually become competent in those skills. Ngaiyaye et al. (2017) in their study regarding clinical preceptors (supervisors) reported that supervisors create learning opportunities for student according to students ‘need. This facilitates the development of confidence

in students. Similarly, Kristofferzon et al. (2013) as quoted by Dehghani et al. (2015) alluded to the fact that clinical supervision yields positive results during clinical education and also provided an opportunity for students to become more independent and autonomous in their learning (Carveret et al., 2014).

#### **Increases Student’s Reflective Thinking, Self-evaluation and Decision Making**

Reflective thinking is one of the major concepts in nursing practice. It is the ability to have a retrospective contemplation of practice undertaken in order to uncover the knowledge used in a particular situation, by analysing and interpreting the information recalled (Burns and Bulman, 2000). Literature reviewed indicates that clinical supervision is well appreciated by student as it enhances thinking and reflection on their learning as well as developing their knowledge and skills. Clinical supervision also provides an opportunity for students to engage in active reflection on previous experiences and perform self-evaluation for personal growth (Severinsson and Sand, 2010; Echternacht and Young, 2008; Manninen et al., 2015; Haggman-Laitila et al., 2007). Student nurses can become more aware of how they feel about themselves, think, and act maturely while maturely, accepting what one has to improve. While in the clinical environment students learn from real clinical experiences and their competence and decision-making skills are enhanced when they reflect together with the supervisor on critical incidents through feedback and dialogue. Evidence has shown that feedback through the reflective process helps students identify their deficiencies and this gives them confidence to work towards improving their skills (Kaphagawani and Useh, 2013).

#### **CONCLUSIONS**

This literature review aimed at determining role that supervision plays in acquisition of clinical skills among nursing and midwifery students. Although most of the literature does not focus directly on acquisition of clinical skills, one factor coming out in all the articles is that clinical supervision plays a vital role in the learning processes of students in the clinical area. The reviewers have also come to a conclusion that clinical supervision regardless of the model used it still has an important role when it comes to acquisition of skill by students in the clinical area. However, despite the fact that it plays an important role, other factors have to be considered during the supervision process for it to be effective; for example conducive learning environment, adequate staff and many others. Students should also have the knowledge of what clinical supervision is for them to appreciate it.

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