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“The Clinical Learning Environment as a Bridge to Excellence: Exploring the Mediating Role of Clinical Learning Environment in the Relationship Between Mentorship and Student Competence in Obstetric and Gynecological Nursing – A Comprehensive Review”

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Abstract: The development of competent nursing professionals is a fundamental objective of nursing education, particularly in specialized fields such as Obstetric and Gynecological (OBG) Nursing. Clinical competence among nursing students is influenced by numerous educational factors, among which mentorship and the clinical learning environment play significant roles. Mentorship provides professional guidance, emotional support, and practical knowledge transfer, while the clinical learning environment offers opportunities for experiential learning and skill acquisition. Recent evidence suggests that the clinical learning environment may function as a mediator in the relationship between mentorship and student competence. This review explores the interconnected relationships among mentorship, clinical learning environment, and student competence in OBG nursing. The article examines theoretical foundations, components of effective mentorship, characteristics of supportive clinical learning environments, mechanisms of mediation, challenges, and implications for nursing education and practice. Findings indicate that mentorship alone may not directly enhance competence unless supported by a positive clinical learning environment that facilitates learning, professional socialization, and confidence-building. Strengthening mentorship programs and improving clinical learning environments can significantly contribute to the development of competent OBG nursing graduates capable of delivering safe and evidence-based maternal healthcare.

Keywords: *Clinical Learning Environment, Mentorship, Student Competence, OBG Nursing, Nursing Education, Clinical Competence, Nursing Students, Maternal Health Nursing, Professional Development, Experiential Learning*

Introduction

Nursing education is a dynamic process that integrates theoretical knowledge with practical experience to prepare students for professional practice. Among nursing specialties, Obstetric and Gynecological (OBG) Nursing presents unique challenges due to its direct involvement in maternal, fetal, and reproductive healthcare. Nursing students are expected to develop advanced clinical competencies, critical thinking skills, communication abilities, and professional behaviors necessary for providing safe and effective care to women throughout the reproductive lifespan. Clinical competence has emerged as a key indicator of educational effectiveness in nursing programs. Competence encompasses the integration of knowledge, psychomotor skills, decision-making abilities, ethical reasoning, and professional attitudes necessary for quality patient care (Benner, 1984). However, developing

competence is influenced by various educational and environmental factors.

Mentorship has long been recognized as a powerful educational strategy in nursing. Through mentorship, experienced nurses guide students in translating theoretical knowledge into clinical practice. Mentors provide emotional support, role modeling, constructive feedback, and professional guidance that facilitate student learning and confidence.

Simultaneously, the clinical learning environment serves as the setting where nursing students engage in experiential learning. The quality of this environment significantly influences learning outcomes, professional socialization, and competence development. A supportive clinical environment encourages student participation, collaboration, reflection, and independent practice.



Recent educational research suggests that the clinical learning environment may act as a mediating factor between mentorship and student competence. In other words, effective mentorship contributes to student competence partly through its influence on the quality of the clinical learning experience. Understanding this relationship is particularly important in OBG nursing, where students encounter complex clinical situations involving maternal and neonatal health.

This review explores the mediating role of the clinical learning environment in the relationship between mentorship and student competence in OBG nursing and highlights strategies for optimizing educational outcomes.

Conceptual Framework

The relationship between mentorship, clinical learning environment, and student competence can be understood through experiential learning theory and social learning theory.

According to experiential learning theory proposed by **David Kolb**, learning occurs through concrete experiences, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. Clinical placements provide opportunities for students to engage in this learning cycle.

Similarly, **Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory** emphasizes observational learning, role modeling, and social interaction. Mentors serve as professional role models whose behaviors and clinical practices are observed and adopted by students.

Table 1. Conceptual Relationship among Key Variables

Variable	Definition	Influence on Student Competence
Mentorship	Professional guidance provided by experienced nurses	Enhances confidence, learning, and professional growth
Clinical Learning Environment	Clinical setting where students acquire practical experience	Facilitates skill development and application
Student Competence	Integration of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and judgment	Determines readiness for professional practice

The framework suggests that mentorship directly influences competence while simultaneously shaping the quality of the clinical learning environment, which further enhances competence.

Understanding Mentorship in OBG Nursing Education

Mentorship is a structured relationship in which an experienced professional supports the learning and development of a less experienced individual. In nursing education, mentors play a crucial role in helping students transition from theoretical understanding to practical competence.

Within OBG nursing, mentors expose students to diverse clinical experiences, including antenatal care, labor and delivery, postpartum care, neonatal assessment, gynecological procedures, reproductive health counseling, and emergency obstetric management.

Effective mentorship contributes to:

- Professional identity formation
- Increased clinical confidence
- Enhanced critical thinking
- Improved clinical decision-making
- Reduction of anxiety during clinical placements
- Development of evidence-based practice skills

Mentors also help students navigate emotionally demanding situations such as pregnancy complications, fetal loss, maternal emergencies, and reproductive health crises.

Research indicates that nursing students who receive effective mentorship demonstrate higher levels of satisfaction, confidence, and clinical performance compared to those with limited mentor support (Myall et al., 2008).

Components of Effective Mentorship

Successful mentorship involves multiple dimensions that collectively support student learning.

Professional Guidance

Mentors facilitate learning by explaining clinical procedures, discussing patient management strategies, and helping students integrate classroom knowledge into practice.

Emotional Support

Clinical environments can be stressful for students, especially in OBG settings where high-risk pregnancies and emergencies are common. Emotional support from mentors reduces anxiety and promotes resilience.

Constructive Feedback

Feedback enables students to identify strengths and weaknesses, fostering continuous improvement in clinical performance.

Role Modeling

Students learn professional behaviors, ethical practices, communication techniques, and patient-centered care through observation of mentors.

Career Development



Mentors inspire students to pursue lifelong learning, advanced specialization, and leadership roles in nursing.

Table 2. Characteristics of Effective Nursing Mentors

Characteristic	Educational Impact
Clinical expertise	Enhances knowledge transfer
Communication skills	Improves understanding
Accessibility	Encourages student engagement
Empathy	Reduces student stress
Professionalism	Promotes ethical practice
Teaching ability	Facilitates competence development

Clinical Learning Environment in OBG Nursing

The clinical learning environment refers to the physical, social, psychological, and organizational conditions within healthcare settings that influence student learning.

In OBG nursing, clinical environments include:

- Labor rooms
- Maternity wards
- Antenatal clinics
- Postnatal units
- Gynecology wards
- Infertility clinics
- Neonatal intensive care units

These settings provide opportunities for students to observe, participate, and perform nursing interventions under supervision.

A positive clinical learning environment is characterized by:

- Supportive staff attitudes
- Patient safety culture
- Effective supervision
- Adequate learning opportunities
- Respectful communication
- Interprofessional collaboration

Conversely, negative environments may limit learning through inadequate supervision, excessive workload, poor communication, or hostile workplace cultures.

Dimensions of the Clinical Learning Environment

Several dimensions contribute to the effectiveness of clinical learning environments.

Pedagogical Atmosphere

A learning-oriented culture encourages inquiry, questioning, reflection, and evidence-based practice.

Leadership and Management

Supportive nurse managers facilitate student integration and provide resources for learning.

Supervisory Relationships

Positive interactions between students, mentors, and staff create psychological safety and promote confidence.

Learning Opportunities

Exposure to diverse clinical cases enables students to develop comprehensive clinical skills.

Interprofessional Collaboration

Working with multidisciplinary teams enhances communication and teamwork competencies.

Table 3. Dimensions of an Effective Clinical Learning Environment

Dimension	Description
Pedagogical atmosphere	Supports learning and reflection
Leadership style	Encourages student participation
Supervisory relationships	Provides guidance and support
Learning opportunities	Enhances skill acquisition
Team collaboration	Develops communication skills
Patient-centered culture	Promotes quality care

Student Competence in OBG Nursing

Competence is a multidimensional concept involving the ability to perform professional responsibilities safely and effectively.

In OBG nursing, competence includes:

- Maternal assessment skills
- Fetal monitoring interpretation
- Labor management
- Postpartum care
- Neonatal assessment
- Family education
- Emergency response
- Ethical decision-making

Clinical competence extends beyond technical skills and incorporates critical thinking, communication, cultural sensitivity, and professional judgment.

Table 4. Core Competencies in OBG Nursing

Competency Domain	Examples
Clinical skills	Maternal and neonatal assessments
Critical thinking	Managing obstetric emergencies
Communication	Counseling mothers and families
Professionalism	Ethical and legal practice
Teamwork	Collaboration with healthcare teams



Evidence-based practice Applying current guidelines

The Mediating Role of Clinical Learning Environment

A mediator is a variable that explains how or why one factor influences another. In this context, the clinical learning environment serves as a mechanism through which mentorship influences student competence.

Mentorship contributes to creating a supportive clinical environment by fostering trust, encouraging participation, and facilitating access to learning opportunities. Students who receive strong mentorship are more likely to perceive the clinical environment positively and engage actively in learning activities. The clinical learning environment subsequently enhances competence by providing opportunities for:

- Hands-on practice
- Reflection
- Skill reinforcement
- Collaborative learning
- Confidence building

Thus, mentorship influences competence both directly and indirectly through the quality of the clinical learning environment.

Table 5. Mediation Pathway

Stage	Process
Mentorship	Guidance, support, role modeling
Clinical Learning Environment	Learning opportunities and engagement
Student Competence	Enhanced knowledge, skills, and confidence

Mechanisms Through Which Clinical Learning Environment Mediates the Relationship

Enhancement of Learning Opportunities

Effective mentors help students access meaningful clinical experiences. The supportive environment allows students to apply theoretical knowledge and gain practical expertise.

Promotion of Psychological Safety

Students learn more effectively when they feel respected and supported. Mentors contribute to psychological safety by encouraging questions and reducing fear of mistakes.

Strengthening Reflective Practice

Clinical environments that promote reflection enable students to analyze experiences, identify learning needs, and improve future performance.

Encouraging Professional Socialization

Students gradually adopt professional values, behaviors, and identities through interactions within supportive clinical environments.

Building Self-Efficacy

Positive clinical experiences strengthen students' confidence in their abilities, enhancing competence and readiness for independent practice.

Evidence from Existing Literature

Numerous studies have examined the relationships among mentorship, clinical learning environment, and competence.

Research consistently demonstrates that effective mentorship improves student satisfaction, confidence, and academic performance. Studies have also shown that supportive clinical learning environments are associated with higher competence scores and better clinical outcomes.

A systematic review by Saarikoski and Leino-Kilpi (2002) highlighted supervisory relationships as one of the strongest predictors of positive clinical learning experiences. Similarly, Chan (2004) reported that supportive clinical environments significantly influence student learning outcomes and professional development.

More recent studies indicate that students who perceive their clinical environments positively report greater competence, stronger critical thinking abilities, and increased readiness for professional practice.

Collectively, these findings support the hypothesis that the clinical learning environment mediates the relationship between mentorship and competence.

Challenges Affecting Mentorship and Clinical Learning Environment

Despite their importance, several barriers may hinder effective mentorship and learning.

Staff Shortages

Nursing shortages often reduce the time available for mentorship and supervision.

Heavy Workloads

Clinical demands may limit opportunities for teaching and student engagement.

Inadequate Mentor Preparation

Some nurses lack formal training in mentorship and educational strategies.

Negative Workplace Culture



Hostile or unsupportive environments discourage student participation and learning.

Limited Clinical Exposure

Restricted access to diverse clinical cases may impair competence development.

Table 6. Challenges and Their Educational Consequences

Challenge	Impact on Learning
Staff shortages	Reduced supervision
Work overload	Limited teaching time
Poor mentorship training	Inconsistent guidance
Negative culture	Increased anxiety
Limited case exposure	Reduced competence development

Strategies to Strengthen the Clinical Learning Environment

Improving clinical learning environments requires coordinated efforts from educational institutions and healthcare organizations. Structured mentorship programs should be implemented to ensure consistency and quality of student support. Mentor training programs can enhance teaching skills, communication, and feedback delivery.

Healthcare organizations should foster cultures that value student learning and professional development. Adequate staffing, protected teaching time, and recognition of mentorship contributions can strengthen learning environments.

Simulation-based education may complement clinical placements by providing safe opportunities for skill practice and critical thinking development.

Regular evaluation of clinical learning environments through student feedback can help identify areas requiring improvement.

Implications for OBG Nursing Education

The findings of this review have important implications for nursing educators, clinical mentors, healthcare administrators, and policymakers.

Educational institutions should recognize that mentorship and clinical learning environments are interconnected rather than independent factors. Investments in mentor development alone may not achieve optimal outcomes unless accompanied by improvements in clinical learning environments.

Curricula should incorporate strategies that promote collaborative learning, reflective practice, and professional socialization. Partnerships between academic institutions and healthcare organizations are essential for creating supportive clinical learning experiences.

OBG nursing educators should emphasize mentorship models that facilitate experiential learning, confidence-building, and evidence-based practice.

Future Research Directions

Although growing evidence supports the mediating role of clinical learning environments, further research is needed.

Future studies should:

- Employ longitudinal designs to establish causal relationships.
- Examine cultural influences on mentorship and learning environments.
- Investigate virtual and simulation-based learning environments.
- Explore mentor training interventions.
- Evaluate competency outcomes across diverse OBG clinical settings.

Such research can provide stronger evidence for educational policy and practice improvements.

Conclusion

Clinical competence is a critical outcome of OBG nursing education and is significantly influenced by both mentorship and the clinical learning environment. Mentorship provides essential guidance, emotional support, feedback, and professional role modeling, while the clinical learning environment offers the experiential context necessary for competence development. Evidence suggests that the clinical learning environment serves as a vital mediator between mentorship and student competence, enhancing the effectiveness of mentorship through supportive learning opportunities, psychological safety, professional socialization, reflective practice, and confidence-building.

For nursing educators and healthcare organizations, the findings emphasize the need to create integrated educational strategies that simultaneously strengthen mentorship programs and optimize clinical learning environments. Such efforts can enhance student competence, improve educational outcomes, and ultimately contribute to safer and higher-quality maternal and reproductive healthcare services. As healthcare systems continue to evolve, fostering positive clinical learning experiences will remain essential for preparing competent and confident OBG nursing professionals capable of meeting the complex needs of women and families.

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