



The Role of Preceptors in Clinical Practice: Student Midwives' Knowledge, Perspectives and Challenges in Koforidua and St. Patricks Nursing and Midwifery Training Colleges, Eastern and Ashanti Regions of Ghana

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Abstract

Midwifery is a practice-based discipline, therefore learning experiences in the clinical setting are integral to the preparation of registered midwives. Preceptors are experienced nurses and midwives who work in a variety of clinical and academic settings. They are assigned to a new or a novice midwife to guide them through an orientation process and a transition to their new role. Hence, their primary responsibility to the midwifery student in the clinical setting is to provide meaningful and relevant learning experiences. This study sought to examine student midwives' knowledge and perspectives of the role of the preceptor as well as the challenges faced by the students in Koforidua and St. Patricks Nursing and Midwifery Training Colleges, Eastern and Ashanti Regions of Ghana. Social learning theory was used to guide the study. The study utilized the descriptive survey design with simple random sampling to get information from 269 second and third-year midwifery students from both schools using a structured questionnaire. Data was analysed using the SPSS version 22 and presented in frequency tables and Bar charts. The study findings revealed the majority of midwifery students (60.0%) have knowledge of the preceptorship and encounters preceptors during their clinical work. Most of them (57.3%) perceived that it is the role of a preceptor to help them bridge the gap between classroom and clinical areas. Majority (68.8%) of the student midwives expectations of their preceptors was to help them develop midwifery skills and knowledge. They however faced some challenges with the preceptors in the course of the clinical practice such as lack of student-preceptor relationship, unavailability and inaccessibility of some preceptors, inadequate time to spend with the preceptors and inadequate supervision form preceptors during clinical practice. The study concluded that preceptorship might be a new concept in midwifery education, it is a module that is known to most students and is perceived as an integral part of their training. Based on the findings, the recommendations included Training of more clinical preceptors on their roles for improvement of students' clinical learning outcome among others.

Keywords: Student Midwives; Preceptors; Preceptee; Preceptorship; Role; Clinical Practice; Midwifery; Perspectives; Challenges

Introduction

Midwifery education is an integrated combination of theoretical and practical learning experiences that aim to provide student midwives with knowledge, skills, and attitudes required for future professional practice [1]. Clinical experience is an important aspect of midwifery education as it is the transformation of theoretical knowledge into practice [2] According to [3] clinical teaching

accords a senior midwife who has a supervisory role to mentor a novice colleague to attain the needed competences. Clinical training settings include hospitals, health departments, hospice units, and other health care settings utilized for student teaching [3].

In United States of America, Australia, New Zealand and European countries clinical teaching and learning form a significant part

of pre-registration and education programmes [4]. In these countries, clinical learning plays an important role in improving the practice of both healthcare professionals and student midwives, which in turn contributes to improved care provision [5]. Claimed that students' knowledge, skills acquisition, and theory-practice integration can be enhanced through preceptorship activities [3]. Indicate that it is through experience in the clinical setting that student midwives acquire the knowledge, skills, and values essential to professional practice and become socialised into the midwifery profession. Hence, effective clinical experience is gained through a supportive clinical environment, which includes the atmosphere of the clinical placement unit, and the relationship shared with clinical staff, supervisors and mentors [6].

In Ghanaian nursing education, in order to improve effective clinical teaching and learning, preceptors have been introduced to supervise students in the practice setting. Preceptorship model was first introduced into a peri-operative nursing program in Ghana (1990s); this model was subsequently expanded to basic diploma and bachelor's in nursing education [7]. The preceptorship model has proved to be a highly useful strategy for clinical education as it allows education to be individualized. Classroom knowledge was likened to real patient management problems and provides for role modelling as the student's develops standards and strategies for practice [8]. were of the view that nursing students expect a supportive clinical environment that is innovative, creative and geared towards the needs of individuals. Furthermore, students learn immensely with mentors who appreciate their individuality and the fact that everyone learns differently [9]. Preceptors who are aware of differences in learning styles can better provide experiences to more efficiently meet students learning needs [10].

It is from clinical placement that students start to gather the necessary attributes of caring, critical thinking skills, application of situational knowledge, competence and clinical skills. Therefore, members of the health team should provide a positive clinical experience to facilitate the progress from novice to expert levels of clinical competence [11]. A study conducted by [12] on 62 Australian nursing students revealed that element such as good mentoring, relationship with the clinical staff and opportunity to practice yielded positive impact in students' learning in the clinical area. In addition, the support given to students by the nursing staff in the clinical setting also plays an important role in the achievement of their learning objectives [13].

The ward learning environment has a lot of external stimuli which disadvantages the student midwife with respect to identifying the learning opportunities [14], asserts that the lack of equipment, lack of guidance, supervision, and negative attitude by the nurses influence the effectiveness of the clinical learning. Anxiety, attitude, academic level, commitment to the work and use of mobile phones by the student nurses affect the quality of learning and compromises the patients' care [15]. The workload, higher numbers of student/teacher ratio in the clinical area, and in the classroom affect the preceptors' role in the clinical teaching [16].

Preceptorship aims to develop the preceptees' confidence and competence whilst simultaneously fostering their clinical practice whether this is a student, newly qualified or newly hired experienced nurse [17]. Preceptorship is found to be used as a source of staff development given that it tended to be considered part of a new nurse's orientation process enabling them to become embedded into their new role and environment [17]. Hence, preceptees were expected to become more autonomous, independent, safe and confident practitioners able to deliver the quality of nursing care demanded by an organisation [18]. According to [19], preceptorship is to develop preceptees within the environment in order to be accommodated both by outsiders and within the environment. Thus, the focus is on developing the preceptors' clinical skills and proficiency to be fit to meet the demands of the environment.

Besides, preceptorship also focuses on other more esoteric dimensions such as environmental and psychological factors; in particular, how confident and/or comfortable a preceptee feels within a given context. In view of this, it is important that student midwives share good relationship with clinical nursing staff as well as their preceptors as this facilitates the identification of the different learning needs and styles of the students [20]. Hence, this study seeks to explore student midwives' knowledge and perspective of preceptorship as well as the encountered challenges, during clinical practice at Koforidua and St. Patrick Nursing and Midwifery Training Colleges in the Eastern and Ashanti Regions of Ghana respectively.

Statement of the problem

Studies on student midwives' knowledge of preceptorship during clinical experience have been done mostly outside Africa. This aspect has been less explored in African context. For instance, studies by [3,19,21,22]. In their day-to-day dealings, students

come into contact with preceptors as they learn, yet their knowledge of the functions and roles of preceptors in their education is unknown.

Evidences from studies have shown that found in their study that, expectations of the student midwives are not met during clinical practice engagement, as the staff are sometimes not aware of the student midwives' learning objectives [23]. Moreover, student midwives experience frustrations during daily practice due to poor integration of theory and practice. There is also lack of tutorial support and guidance by tutors coupled with student midwives' poor interpersonal relationships with clinical staff and preceptors which pose a barriers to learning within the clinical environment [2,23].

The researchers have also noticed that most midwifery students avoid reporting for clinical practice when posted. They intentionally absent themselves from the clinical setting during clinical practice. These students experienced problems in the clinical/practice, hence they spend less time with the preceptors who are always busy with ward work leaving the students to their own fate. The students are rather used for errands at work as against the actual clinical practice. The researchers also often hear midwifery students expressing concern that they performed below expectations in the clinical areas and expressed hopelessness and dissatisfaction. They could not tell the actual role of the preceptors towards them, and so could not make proper use of the opportunities to enhance their clinical practice and experience. This concern generated a curiosity to investigate the student midwives' knowledge and perception of the roles of preceptors during clinical practice in Koforidua and St. Patricks Nursing and Midwifery training colleges in the Eastern and Ashanti Regions of Ghana.

Objective of the study

Specifically the study sought to

- Determine student midwives' knowledge on preceptorship.
- Examine student midwives' perspective on the role of preceptors during clinical practice.
- Identify the challenges student midwives face with preceptors

Literature review

Preceptorship

Preceptorship involves the pairing of an experienced teacher with a less experienced learner with the goal of achieving selected learning objectives [24]. In the context of midwifery, preceptorship is where a student or a newly graduated midwife is paired with a

clinical nurse in the clinical practice setting. This relationship between the student (the preceptor) and the clinical nurse (the preceptor) is with the aim of providing supervision and feedback on tasks pertaining to clinical practice [25]. The three main players that are essential in a student's learning experience are the preceptor, the student and the nurse educator. These three individuals need to work together and communicate well in order to achieve the best possible learning experience [25].

Preceptorship is important to midwifery education for a wide variety of reasons. It assists nursing students to incorporate theory into practice, integrates students into the practice setting within the organization and allows students to apply learning and internalize the values of the profession within a nurturing and supportive relationship [26]. It is also becoming an integral part of midwifery education, despite a recent review indicating differences in the quality of programs and preceptors [26]. Other benefits of clinical preceptorship programs for educators in particular include continuity and consistency of education, increased satisfaction and retention of students as-well-as enhancement of developing a shared responsibility for education and training [27]. Moreover, midwives who precept can connect with students in ways that others cannot, building trust and responsibility, while easing the transition into the "real world" of healthcare [28].

In United States of America, Australia, New Zealand and European countries, clinical teaching and learning form a significant part of pre-registration and education programmes [4]. In these countries, clinical learning plays an important role in improving the practice of both healthcare professionals and student midwives, which in turn contributes to improved care provision. [5] claimed that students' knowledge, skills acquisition, and theory-practice integration can be enhanced through preceptorship activities.

Moreover, international interpretations regarding the meaning and use of terms such as counselling, mentoring, and coaching to describe clinical teaching and preceptorship increase the confusion manifested between individuals when applying the terms preceptorship and mentorship to different forms of clinical education [19]. There is no clear definition of what the term preceptorship means in the literature since each study appears to adopt a definition appropriate to itself based on each organisation's interpretation and understanding of the meaning of preceptorship [28]. The lack of a standard definition of the term 'preceptorship' has resulted in confusion for readers regarding what preceptorship should be and its relative goals [19].

The notion of preceptorship has been explored in numerous empirical studies as well as opinion and review papers in order to try to define the term more precisely [29]. As part of the current review, multiple definitions of preceptorship were discovered. However, generally preceptorship was found to have been defined as a clinical education programme aimed at providing access to a competent, supportive role-model through a time-limited relationship between the preceptor and preceptee [29]. The time-limited nature of this relationship was viewed by [16] as a transitional period, which lasted only until the novice practitioner had achieved some form of role transition.

Knowledge on preceptorship

Nurses who are competent and those who possess an ability to make swift clinical judgments and decisions are more sought after than ever, and clinical practice is where students gather real-life experiences in modern day healthcare provision. Accordingly, the clinical learning environment in midwifery education has been growing as a fundamental focus area over the past two decades [30].

Though there are diverse definitions in various sources, typically, a preceptorship involves the pairing of an experienced teacher with a less experienced learner with the goal of achieving selected learning objectives [24].

In a study conducted by [31] to assess Knowledge and attitude towards nursing clinical preceptorship among Ethiopian nurse educators in Addis Ababa University, 117 respondents were asked whether they know what clinical preceptorship is and 90 (82.6%) acknowledged that they do. Among these, 50 (56.8%) said that attending trainings and workshops was how they familiarized themselves with it. Hearing people talk about preceptorship with 19 (21.6%) and reading about it 12 (13.6%) were also the most frequently reported ways of familiarization with preceptorship. Among the respondents who reported familiarity with the concept of nursing clinical preceptorship, 66 (74.2%) of educators said that their respective teaching institutions do apply nursing clinical preceptorship. The majority of respondents, 66 (60.6%) responded that the main purpose of clinical preceptorship programs is to develop clinical skills as-well-as ease the transition into being a healthcare professional. According to the results of the study it was found that less than half of the nurse educators that participated in the study were found to have adequate knowledge regarding nursing clinical preceptorship and its related concepts. More importantly, it was found that existing knowledge towards midwifery

clinical preceptorship among the educators tends to increase with advanced education and longer teaching experiences. Institutions should focus their efforts towards implementing an integrated approach of clinical preceptorship by embracing preceptorship as the core of clinical learning for midwifery students, starting with improving the awareness and understanding of the students and midwife educators towards it.

In a busy setting, there may be limited time for teaching and feedback from preceptors. Students may not find learning to be collaborative with the preceptor. Additionally, personal attributes of the midwife preceptor are found to influence preceptors' role and commitment [32]. These attributes of preceptors have been identified as mainly patience, non-judgmental, empathic, warm, respectful, fairness and flexibility [32]. It was reported that such personal attributes can affect nurses' attitudes and beliefs towards preceptorship [33] in turn affect whether they see preceptees as an integral part of midwifery or a separate additional responsibility. When preceptorship is seen as an integral part of midwifery, the preceptor acknowledge the presence of the model as beneficial to both themselves and students.

Student midwives expectation of preceptorship

Due to the role of preceptorship in clinical practices, several studies have been conducted on the expectation of student nurses of preceptorship. One of such studies was conducted by [34] to explore the expectations of final year nursing students on preceptorship. A longitudinal, questionnaire survey was used to explore the expectations of preceptorship, from the perspective of newly qualified nurses, as part of a Department of Health funded study into the careers of people qualifying from nursing diploma courses. The paper demonstrates how pilot work with a cohort of newly qualified nurses, combined with literature on preceptorship, enabled the identification of key aspects of preceptorship. Findings from the study showed that there was an overwhelming demand for preceptorship, and the majority of respondents anticipated that all identified aspects of preceptorship would be important in their first job. Aspects identified as particularly important were 'constructive feedback on my clinical skills' and 'teaching new clinical skills'.

Similarly, [35] also conducted a study to describe newly-graduated nurses' perceptions of their student clinical intersession placement and how these placements impacted their functioning as graduate nurses. Inductive semantic analysis of the data revealed four themes: developing nursing skills and knowledge;

preparing for future employment; experiencing supportive relationships and experiencing realities of work-life. Findings from the study revealed that educators must ensure that clinical placement are in an environment that is conducive to learning and promotes the personal and professional development of nursing students. Positive clinical experiences are more likely related to how valued and supported students feel than the physical aspects of a placement; thus, it is imperative educators assess and focus on providing placement that offer a supportive learning environment.

[36] also conducted a study on Finnish and Swedish nursing students' experiences of their first clinical practice placement. The aim of the study was to illuminate first year undergraduate nursing students' experiences of clinical practice during their first clinical placement, with a focus on perception, reflection, and the link between theory and practice. Data was collected by focus group interviews with 22 nursing students, and analyzed with qualitative content analysis. Findings from the study showed that positive experiences included stimulating and visible preceptors, a permissive atmosphere, and reflection as a matter of course. Negative experiences were related to feelings of abandonment and powerlessness when preceptors were invisible and the atmosphere at the ward was non-permissive. The implementation of research-based knowledge was insufficient.

Role of preceptorship in clinical midwifery practices

The most striking fact according to several authors is that preceptors should be experienced, registered and/or competent, clinically based, nurses capable of providing clinical support and guidance for new learners (preceptees) on a one-on-one basis by engaging in teaching and/or role modelling [32,37]. The term preceptee has also been defined as a newly hired experienced nurse/midwife who needs to be adjusted to the clinical area and learn the necessary skills and procedures to practice independently and competently in order to provide the required quality of nursing/midwifery care to patients [19].

The preceptor's role is to provide day-to-day clinical teaching for the preceptee [38]. Thus, a preceptor should be a teacher or instructor [38]. However, as [39] clarified, the first priority for preceptors is patient care in addition to teaching the preceptee how to deliver safe care within their scope of practice. Despite their having to put patients first, preceptors still play a major role in reducing preceptee stress, helping them overcome their fear of the unknown, and changing their attitudes and perceptions of nursing

practice from those they started out with [39]. Thus, an expert preceptor is one who thinks ahead about the type of activities that will help the preceptee progress [39].

In addition, it is imperative that preceptors communicate with the preceptee to meet his/her expectations regardless of the number, type and complexity of patients that need to be managed, in order to help the preceptee reflect on his/her difficulties and identify how clinical performance might be improved [40]. Similarly, [41] added the preceptor should be committed to the role by observing, assessing and evaluating the preceptee's clinical development. [41], in his opinion paper, indicates that the preceptor needs to collaborate with the nurse educator and nurse manager in order to evaluate the preceptee's performance, address any further needs and provide a formal written evaluation at the end of the preceptorship programme.

Furthermore, [42] added that preceptors were responsible for helping the preceptee apply his/her theoretical knowledge to practice and identify the preceptee's needs by demonstrating sufficient knowledge of their nursing programme. In addition, the preceptor should comprehend how the preceptee accommodates to the new clinical setting, works collaboratively with others and provides continuous feedback to the preceptor.

The role of preceptorship in the clinical performance and competence of newly qualified nurses have been found to have been examined across a number of research studies [31] conducted a study on the effects of a preceptorship programme on turnover rate, cost, quality and professional development.

[43] also conducted a study to elicit student nurses' perceptions of the impact of mentorship on clinical learning. A qualitative descriptive research design was used in the study. A purposive sample of 29 student nurses in their third year of a Diploma Programme participated in the study. The study was undertaken at a British University. Data was collected by focus group interviews. The interviews were taped and transcribed verbatim by the researcher. Data was analyzed using content analysis. The findings of the study indicated that mentors played a major role in enhancing students' learning through support, acting as role models, performing socialization roles, and acting as assessors. While mentors played a major role in enhancing learning for students, there was a general agreement between students that there would need to be more emphasis on the acquisition of analytic skills and prob-

lem solving for students in order to prepare them for the demands of clinical nursing practice in the future. Furthermore, [43] data also indicated a significant correlation between perceived levels of competency and the preceptee-preceptor relationship suggesting that there is a need to create an environment conducive to clinical learning.

Challenges associated with preceptorship

The literature suggests that clinical learning is affected by many factors, including the quality of supervision and feedback and characteristics of learners and teachers [44]. Assigning a preceptor to a nursing student will not always guarantee a successful placement [44], which again suggests that preceptors require further preparation for their role. Lack of student-preceptor relationship is found to be unhelpful for student learning, although feeling part of the team is directly linked to opportunities for learning [44].

However, preceptees feel unsupported at times by preceptors, citing lack of availability and accessibility [12]. They have not enough time to spend with nursing students, citing heavy workloads and ensuring safe client care among the reasons [37]. Preceptorship is among the most stressful of student experiences. The increased number of stress factors encountered in the student role, place nursing/midwifery students at greater risk for developing mental health symptoms than the general population [22]. In their qualitative study bring to light a number of challenges facing nursing students and preceptors. A qualitative research design was adopted for this study. Forty-seven final year nursing students were questioned using a structured enquiry schedule about their experiences of preceptorship during clinical placement. All participants were female. The data was analyzed thematically according to [45] framework. The results indicated that while a small minority found the experience of preceptors enhanced their learning while on clinical placement, the majority had a less than optimal experience. Reasons for this included: busy workloads of preceptors, difficulty in the accessibility of the preceptor and lack of preceptor training. Their findings point out that, while a small minority of the students found that their experience with preceptors improved their learning while on clinical placement, the majority had a less than optimal experience. Levels of support for students varied, and the arrangement tended towards an ad hoc execution of preceptorship.

[46] assessed the views of preceptors and preceptees in a practice-based project. The two focus groups with newly registered paediatric nurses suggested a move towards developing preceptorship programmes which would be timely and at the commencement of the nursing students' clinical placement. Recommendations were

that the training programme should be undertaken in the learning environment and appropriate study days given to staff nurses to embark on the programme. However, the findings suggested a prerequisite for preceptors to have "protected time" out from their role to undertake the preceptorship programme.

A phenomenological study undertaken by [47] to explore and describe students' experience of preceptorship revealed five key themes: confidence, friendship, being thrown in at the deep end, peer support, and lack of support. They undertook a qualitative study with thirteen undergraduate nursing students. The findings suggested that preceptors contributed to the students' development of confidence or the depletion of it. Being friendly and approachable is an important aspect of the preceptorship experience. Peer support is another important finding: the students in the study were comfortable when they had other students on the placement with them, as they felt protective of each other and didn't feel singled out. Another theme, being thrown in at the deep end, is stressful for students and remains one of the challenges of clinical placement in nursing/midwifery.

Bandura's Social Learning Theory was used to direct this study [48]. theory posits that human behavior is learned through observation and watching role models. The novice nurse observes the qualified nurse in the act of undertaking client care, and from this the nursing student recognises how to undertake nursing care. What they observe acts as a guide for them to repeat the same behaviour on later occasions [22,48]. The ward provides a safe environment for nursing students to engage in learning with their preceptor and other staff, through observation and interaction with them and through discussion with colleagues. According to [48] the environment, person and behaviour all affect each other; this is known as reciprocal determinism.

In social learning theory, it is argued that an indirect learning occurs which stems from the observation of other people's behaviours. By means of this learning method, individuals are able to learn the generalized and settled learning structures without the need for trial and error [48]. In Bandura's theory, learning through modeling involves four basic processes as attention, retention, motivation, and production [48].

Methodology

Study setting

The study was conducted at the Koforidua and St. Patrick's Nursing and Midwifery Training Colleges, in the Eastern and Ashanti Regions of Ghana. The Nursing and Midwifery Training College,

Koforidua is situated in Adweso a suburb of Koforidua in the New-Juaben Municipality. The college offers a three-year diploma in registered nursing and midwifery. Its population stands at about 722 which comprises 33 teaching staff, 22 non-teaching staff and 667 students of which 430 are student midwives.

The St. Patrick's Nursing and Midwifery Training school, Maase-Offinso is located at Maase in the Offinso Municipality, a township of about 36km from Kumasi in the Ashanti Region of Ghana. The college is situated on the same compound as the St. Patrick's Hospital. The St. Patrick's is Nursing and Midwifery Training College (SPNMTC) is a non-profit making training institution under the umbrella of the Catholic Archdiocese of Kumasi, and the sponsorship of the Ministry of Health. Its population stands at about 1375, which comprises 35 teaching staff, 40 non-teaching staff and 1300 students of which 520 are student midwives.

Research design

In this study, the descriptive survey design was employed in carrying out the study. As a descriptive study in nature, it involved direct exploration, analysis and description of the particular phenomenon in question [49].

Research population

Both colleges Koforidua NMTC and St. Patrick's NMTC has a total of 430 and 520 students offering the midwifery programme. For this study, only the second- and third-year midwifery students were the target population because they had been on clinical attachment for longer periods.

Sampling Size and sampling technique

A simple random sampling technique was used to select participants. This technique is a probability sampling method, which creates an equal chance for participants to be selected for the study. The sample size for this study was 900 student midwives from both institutions. Therefore, with a population of 900 at 95% confidence interval and degree of accuracy/margin of error of 5% the recommended sample size was 269. In selecting our respondents, a list of all the second- and third-year midwifery students in both schools was acquired and assigned numbers, which were picked randomly, and the selected numbers picked by the students of both institutions were recruited for the study.

Tool for data collection and analysis

A self-developed questionnaire was used to illicit responses from the participants. This was divided into five sections, A to E.

Section A dealt with the demographic data of the respondents while the other sections focused on the research objectives.

Validity and reliability

Validity of the instrument was tested through construct validity, face validity and content validity. With construct validity, the instrument was developed based on literature, focusing on the main findings of previous studies. Face and content validity were determined through scrutiny by the supervisor.

In finding the reliability of the instrument, a pretesting on 15 students was conducted at the Holy Family Nursing and Midwifery Training College, Techiman. This setting was chosen because its homogenous nature to Koforidua and St. Patrick's Nursing and Midwifery Training Colleges, in the Eastern and Ashanti Regions of Ghana. After the pretest, corrections were made on the research to ensure that they yielded the needed results during administration.

Data collection procedure

An introductory letter was obtained from the Department of Midwifery, Garden City University College (GCUC) to the Principals of the Nursing and Midwifery Training Colleges in Koforidua and St. Patrick's Nursing and midwifery Training, off in so to seek permission to use the student midwives as participants for the study. The study participants were selected, and the research purpose, procedures and benefits were explained to them, and written consent obtained. After the permission had been granted, the respondents were briefed as to what the study is about in order to get their needed attention, support and co-operation. Respondents were then given time to complete the questionnaire.

Data analysis

The data was sorted, edited, coded and analysed. Coding aided the researchers to assign numerals to the various responses of the items on the questionnaire. The data was analysed using the Statistical Package for Service Solution (SPSS) version 22. As a result of the descriptive nature of the study, descriptive statistical tools were employed in analysing the data into frequencies and percentages.

Ethical consideration

A letter from the Department of Midwifery, GCUC was sent to the principals of the various settings to seek permission to conduct the study. During the administration of the questionnaire, respondents were assured of confidentiality, anonymity and voluntary participation. With confidentiality, the research participants were

assured that the information they provided would be used for the purpose of the study only. With anonymity, the study avoided the use of names or any other means of identification of the participants of the study. With voluntary participation, respondents were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any point of the data collection without affecting the services they received. Finally, participants were recruited freely without any intimidation.

Results

Demographic characteristics of study participants

Characteristics	Frequency	Percent (%)
Mean age, SD	24.5 (4.14)	
Age, In years		
19-25	178	74.5
26-40	61	25.5
Current Level		
200	165	69.0
300	74	31.0

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of study participants N = 239.

Source (Field Data, 2022).

From Table 1 above, a total of 239 midwifery students from St. Patrick's and Koforidua Nursing and Midwifery Training Colleges were recruited. The average age of the study participants was 24.5 ± 4.14 years standard deviation with majority 178 (74.5%) of the respondents aged 19-25 years old. More than half 165 (69.0%) of the respondents were in their second year (Level 200).

Student Midwives' Knowledge of preceptorship

Knowledge	Yes, n (%)	No, n (%)
A preceptor is		
A teacher or instructor	140 (58.6)	99 (41.4)
An experience registered midwife who acts as a role model and guide	139 (58.2)	100 (41.8)
A registered midwife who facilitates students learning in the classroom	41 (17.2)	198 (82.8)
A midwife who provides general Knowledge	44 (18.4)	195 (81.6)
Do you have a preceptor in the clinical site	209 (87.4)	30 (12.6)
Does the clinical site need preceptorship	203 (84.9)	36 (15.1)
Are the preceptors in your facilities trained	207 (86.6)	32 (13.4)

Table 2: Student Midwives' Knowledge of Preceptorship N = 239.

Table 2 presents student midwives' knowledge of preceptorship. More than half 140 (58.6%) of the respondents noted that a preceptor is a teacher or an instructor, 139 (58.2%) an experienced registered midwife who acts as a role model and guide. A vast majority 198 (82.8%) of the respondents were able to correctly indicate that a preceptor is not a registered midwife who facilitates students learning in the classroom nor a midwife who provides general knowledge as indicate by about 195 (81.6%) of the respondents. Almost 209 (87.4%) of the respondent had knowledge about the presence of a preceptor on their clinical site. Most 203 (84.9%) of the respondents did agree that clinical sites need preceptorship and 207 (86.6%) affirmed that preceptors in their facilities were trained.

There was a high level 144 (60.0%) of knowledge observed among the respondents regarding preceptorship (Figure 1).

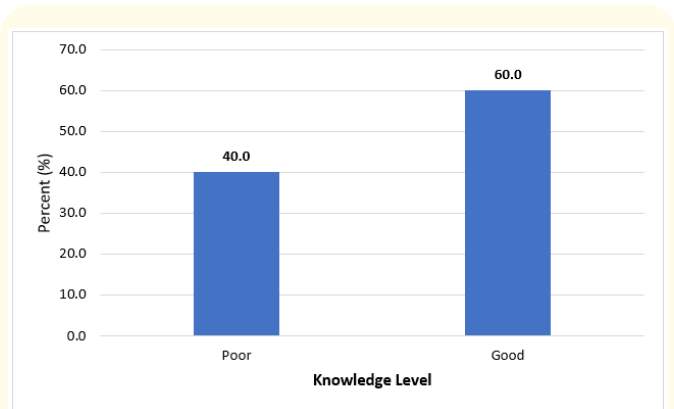


Figure 1: Knowledge of Preceptorship N = 239.

Source: Field work, 2022.

Student Midwives perceived expectations of a Preceptor.

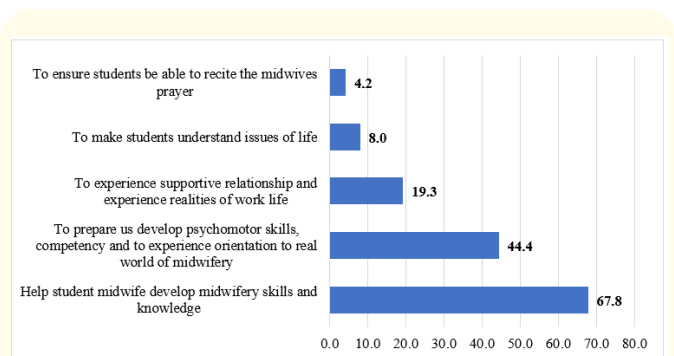


Figure 2: Student Midwives perceived expectations of a Preceptor N = 239.

Majority 172 (68.8%) of the student midwives expected from their preceptors to help them develop midwifery skills and knowledge, 112 (44.8%) to prepare them develop psychomotor skills, competences, and to experience orientation to real word of midwifery, 53 (21.2%) to help them build supportive relationship and realities of work life, 22 (8.8%) to help them understand issues of life and 12 (4.8) to ensure that student midwives are able to recite midwives' prayers (Figure 2).

Factors Associated with Students Midwives Knowledge of Preceptorship.

Characteristics	Poor Knowledge	Good Knowledge	Chi-sq	p-value
Age, In years				
19-25	68(38.2)	110(61.8)	0.697	0.404
26-40	27(44.3)	34(55.7)		
Level				
200	62(37.6)	103(62.4)	1.051	0.305
300	33(44.6)	41(55.4)		

Table 3: Factors Associated with Students Midwives Knowledge of Preceptorship N = 239.

Source: Field work, 2022.

To determine factors associated with student's knowledge of preceptorship, A Pearsons chi-square test of independence with a 95% Confidence Interval was conducted. The test found no statistically significant association between student midwives age ($\chi^2 = 0.697, p = 0.404$), current level ($\chi^2 = 1.051, p = 0.305$). Details of the results are presented in table 3.

Student Midwife's Perception of Roles of Preceptors during Clinic midwifery Practice.

Student midwives' perception about the role of the preceptor during clinical midwifery practice is presented in Table 4 above. More than half 137 (57.3%) of the student midwives perceived that it is the role of a preceptor to help them bridge the gap between classroom and clinical areas, A vast majority 228 (95.4%) excluded ensuring student being paid their due internship allowances as a role of a preceptor. Most 155 (64.9%) of the student midwives perceived their preceptor to orient them to policies and structures regarding their midwifery practice. Only 70 (29.3%) of the student midwives perceived a preceptor as a role model. Almost all 236

Roles of Preceptorship	Yes, n (%)	No, n (%)
The roles of preceptorship in clinical practice include		
Bridging the gap between classroom and clinical area	137 (57.3)	102 (42.7)
To ensure students are paid their due internship allowances	11 (4.6)	228 (95.4)
Orientate student into the policies and structures of the practice	155 (64.9)	84 (35.2)
Act as role models	70 (29.3)	169 (70.7)
The role of preceptorship is necessary in the training of the midwives	236 (98.7)	3 (1.3)
An effective preceptor is		
A role mode	157 (65.7)	82 (34.3)
Hardworking	152 (63.6)	87 (36.4)
Disguise	5 (2.1)	234 (97.9)
Confident	121 (50.6)	118 (49.4)
Timid to other health disciplines	10 (4.2)	229 (95.8)

Table 4: Student Midwife's Perception of Roles of Preceptors during Clinic midwifery Practice N = 239.

Source: Fieldwork, 2022.

(98.7%) the student midwives noted that the role of a preceptor is important in the training of midwives. For student midwives, an effective preceptor is someone who is a role model 157 (65.7%), Hardworking 152 (63.6%) and confident 121 (50.6%). Conversely, to almost all the student midwives, an effective preceptor is not someone who disguise 234 (97.9%) nor timid to other health discipline 229 (95.8%).

Challenges Student Midwives Face During Clinical Practice.

From Table 5 above, for majority 206(86.2%) of the student midwives, lack of student-preceptor relationship has been a challenge to student midwives during clinical practice. Unavailability and inaccessibility of some preceptors 178 (74.5%), Inadequate time to spend with preceptor 200 (83.7%), and inadequate supervision form preceptors during clinical practice 133 (55.6%) were also noted as challenges faced by the student midwives during clinical practice.

Discussion

Student midwives' knowledge of preceptorship

The study showed that majority of the respondent showed good knowledge level of preceptorship. This finding agrees with a

Challenges	Frequency	Percent [%]
Lack of student-preceptor relationship		
No	33	13.8
Yes	206	86.2
Preceptors unavailable and inaccessible		
No	61	25.5
Yes	178	74.5
Inadequate time to spent with preceptors		
No	39	16.3
Yes	200	83.7
Inadequate supervision from preceptors during clinical practice		
No	106	44.4
Yes	133	55.6

Table 5: Challenges Student Midwives Face During Clinical Practice N = 239.
Source: Fieldwork, 2022.

study conducted by [31] to assess knowledge and attitude towards nursing clinical preceptorship among Ethiopian nurse educators in Addis Ababa University and reported that 90 (82.6%) had good knowledge level of preceptorship. The study further revealed that the main purpose of clinical preceptorship programs is to develop clinical skills as-well-as ease the transition into being a healthcare professional [31]. From the our study, most of the respondents further described preceptorship as teacher, instructor or an experience registered midwife who acts as a role model and guide. The definition on preceptorship relates to the explanation by [24] who mentioned that preceptorship involves the pairing of an experienced teacher with a less experienced learner with the goal of achieving selected learning objectives. In the context of midwifery, preceptorship is where a student midwife or a newly graduate midwife is paired with a clinical nurse in the clinical practice setting [26]. In addition, findings from our study shows that students perceived expectations from a preceptor as to helping student midwife develop midwifery skills and knowledge, to prepare student midwife develop psychomotor skills, competency and to experience orientation to real world of midwife. Other perceive expectations in this current study were to experience supportive relationships and experience realities of work. The findings corroborates findings from other studies by [30,47]. In this respect, [25], underlined that this relationship between the student (the preceptor) and the clinical nurse (the preceptor) is with the aim of providing super-

vision and feedback on tasks pertaining to clinical practice. [26] also outlined the importance of preceptorship to nursing and midwifery education to include; assisting nursing/midwifery students to incorporate theory into practice; integrates students into the practice setting within the organization; and allows students to apply learning and internalize the values of the profession within a nurturing and supportive relationship [26]. Moreover, midwives who precept can connect with students in ways that others cannot, building trust and responsibility, while easing the transition into the “real world” of healthcare [28].

Student midwives’ perspective on the role of preceptors during clinical practice

In our study, findings highlighted the participants’ perspective on the preceptors’ roles as training of midwives, orientating students into the policies and structures of the practice and bridging the gap between classroom and clinical area. In agreement [17,34], study findings revealed that preceptor’s role is to provide day-to-day clinical teaching for the preceptee. Thus, a preceptor should be a teacher or instructor.

Furthermore, this study also revealed that effective preceptors were perceived as role models, hardworking, and confident. In a related study [29], stated that preceptor is a nurse who has the ability to integrate educational and work values so that realistic strategies for resolving conflict may be developed, and such a relationship allows for the trainee to work and identify with a competent role model. Moreover, in previous studies, the most striking roles of preceptor include experienced, registered and/or competent, clinically based, nurses capable of providing clinical support and guidance for new learners (preceptees) on a one-on-one basis by engaging in teaching and/or role modelling [32,37,43] also conducted a study to elicit student nurses’ perceptions of the impact of mentorship on clinical learning, and reported that mentors played a major role in enhancing students’ learning through support, acting as role models, performing socialization roles, and acting as assessors.

Challenges student midwives face with preceptors

Regarding challenges confronting student midwives during clinical practices, this study revealed lack of student-preceptor relationship and inadequate time to spent with preceptors. Other challenges included preceptors unavailability and inaccessibility, and inadequate supervision from preceptors during clinical practice. These findings collaborates with assertion by [44], who un-

derlined that clinical learning or preceptorship is affected by many factors, including the quality of supervision and feedback and characteristics of learners and teachers [45]. also stated that assigning a preceptor to a nursing student will not always guarantee a success, hence preceptors require further preparation for their role [45]. also bemoans lack of student-preceptor relationship as a challenge and unhelpful for student learning. However [12,37], reported that preceptees feel unsupported at times by preceptors, alluding to lack of availability and accessibility. In addition [50], conducted a study on challenges facing nursing students and preceptors. The authors reported that majority of their respondents had a less than optimal experience, with reasons such as busy workloads of preceptors, difficulty in the accessibility of the preceptor and lack of preceptor training.

Summary and Conclusions

The study was carried out to assess the knowledge on the role of preceptors and the challenges they encounter during clinical practice among student midwives. Majority of the respondents from the study had good knowledge of preceptorship and had perceived expectations of preceptors as making sure students develop midwifery skills and knowledge and to experience supportive relationship and experience realities of work life to be able to function independently.

Moreover, the role of preceptorship in clinical practice were bridging the gap between classroom and clinical area and orientating student midwives into the policies and structures of the practice, act as role models and training of the midwives. Effective preceptors were also expected to be role models. However, the student midwives' clinical practice and preceptorship is not free from challenges. Challenges they encountered includes lack of student-preceptor relationship, preceptors unavailable and inaccessible, inadequate time to spent with preceptors and inadequate supervision from preceptors during clinical practice. This study therefore concludes that student midwives perceived the roles of preceptors as being very vital to their clinical practice but varied in preceptors' frequent availability and accessibility to their roles which posed huge challenges during clinical practices.

Recommendations

Based on the findings from the study, the following recommendations were made:

- Training of more clinical preceptors on their roles for improvement of students' clinical learning outcome
- Preceptors should relate supervision to intended learning outcome.
- There is need to assign a separate period outside the actual work schedule to allow enough time for preceptor/preceptee interactions.

Implication of findings for midwifery education, research and practice

The preceptor role is pivotal to midwifery education. The study supports the release of clinical midwives to attend training programs that prepare them for their roles. It also highlights the need for proper selection of preceptors, release and training many of them, support and monitoring as to create effective clinical learning environment.

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Conflict of Interest

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