

Peer Support and its' Influence on Academic Engagement among Nursing Students

Asmaa AbdElmagied Elsayed, Prof. Dr.Rabab Mahmoud, Assisst.Prof. Hanaa Mohamed Abdrabou

Department of Nursing Administration-Faculty of Nursing, Ain Shams University - Egypt

Abstract

Background: Peer support is a notion that emphasizes a person's healthy psychological state and has a significant influence on students' academic attainment, performance, and engagement. The study's **aim** was to assess the influence of peer support on academic engagement among nursing students. **Research design:** This study's methodology was a descriptive correlational approach. **Setting:** Nursing Faculty at Ain Shams University, the research was carried out. **Subjects:** 267 out of 875 nursing student of academic year 2022/2023. **Tools:** Peer support survey and academic engagement scale were used to gather data. **Results:** (50%) of first year Nursing students' perceptions of peer support were low. While the vast majority (93.8%) of fourth-year nursing students reported high perceptions of peer support. Nearly half (46.3%) of first-year nursing students exhibited low levels of academic engagement. Although the vast majority of fourth-year nursing students (95.1 percent) exhibited high academic engagement levels. **Conclusion:** Peer support and academic engagement among nursing students were statistically significantly correlated. **Recommendations:** Establish a welcoming and encouraging learning environment for nursing students, foster connections between teachers and students, and encourage participation in both academic and extracurricular activities on the part of students.

Keywords: Academic engagement, Peer support, Nursing student.

Introduction:

Nursing students after entering faculty face several tasks that not only challenge the students' academic capabilities, but social and emotional competencies as well. The academic tasks that these students are expected to complete to meet and surpass these challenges include conducting research, writing records, attending classes, reciting in class, problem-solving, as well as social interactions such as interacting effectively with peers, reaching out to mentors, and empowering the individual potential. The students need to be equipped with skills and knowledge to ensure the academic success (*Molinillo et al, 2022*).

The main objective of higher education is to foster peer support, which reflects unique skills, knowledge, and talents and, eventually, a significant competitive advantage. Universities have traditionally focused on enhancing students' subpar achievements, identifying and addressing their numerous areas of deficiency, and adopting general learning skills. Although using positive psychology's techniques may help college students learn and grow more effectively (*Wentzel et al, 2022*).

Peer support is the process of giving and receiving encouragement and assistance to achieve long-term recovery. Peer supporters offer emotional support, share knowledge, teach skills, provide practical assistance, and connect people with resources, opportunities, communities of support, and other people. In behavioral health, peers offer their unique lived experience with mental health conditions to provide support focused on advocacy, education, mentoring, and motivation (*van dam, 2021*).

Peer assistance has been investigated in connection to a variety of desired student outcomes, including academic success and engagement. Academic engagement is the level of commitment students make to learning-related activities that directly influence intended results. Engagement is a wide concept that includes interactions between institutions and students. Academic success and educational assistance have a beneficial relationship (a kind of behavioral engagement). People who get a lot of support from their peers tend to be optimistic and anticipate good things

to happen, which increases their motivation to work more on their academic endeavors (*Rezvan et al, 2022*).

Academic engagement is the degree to which students engage in a range of college activities in order to achieve desired educational results, such as challenging curriculum, inclusive settings, and regular and intentional interactions with teachers, staff, administrators, and peers. Additionally, this phrase is also used interchangeably with the words participation or integration (*Bond et al, 2020*).

Academic engagement is the process of participating actively in the educational environment. Behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement are all parts of classroom engagement. To describe academic involvement, cognitive engagement must be emphasized. Cognitive engagement is defined as the deliberate act of attending to present interactions and comprehending material (*Gallegos et al, 2022*).

The interested person must exert effort to comprehend difficult duties. The student must thus take an active part in class, pay attention to what's being done, and show curiosity and perseverance. Different degrees of engagement's quality and intensity may be seen. Cognitive involvement may vary from memo-raising and reproducing information to actively analyzing and linking knowledge, depending on the capacity, abilities, and context of a learner (*Perkmann, 2020*).

Students' thoughts, feelings, and behavior in faculty will be influenced by the help they get in response to the circumstance they encounter. Students' thoughts, feelings, and behavior in the classroom will be influenced by the assistance they get in response to the circumstances they encounter. Students benefit from assistance from a number of people to promote academic transition, academic engagement, and accomplishment, including family, instructors, classmates, and close friends. Family, instructors, and peer support are crucial factors for students' growth, both academically and in other areas

(*Zhou&Ntoumanis& Thøgersen-Ntoumani, 2022*).

Significance of the Study

High peer support increases a student's ability to adapt to change, be innovative, and participate in activities. They have frequently been linked to a number of positive consequences, such as increased academic success and superior learning (*Morris, 2020*). The researcher observed that nursing students are required to put in extra effort while attending college because of the long study days that include practice hours and numerous academic tasks like performing research, writing records, and attending classes in addition to problem-solving social relations like effectively interacting with peers and maximizing their own potential. There are some issues that cannot be achieved without the support of peers. So, this study aims to explore the concept of peer support among nursing students and its influence on their academic engagement.

Aim of the study:

It aimed to assess the influence of peer support on academic engagement among nursing students.

Theoretical Hypothesis:

Peer support has an effect on academic engagement among nursing students.

Subjects and Methods

1. Research design

A descriptive correlational design was used in this study.

2. The research design:

The Nursing Faculty of Ain Shams University. It consists of departments for Geriatric, Medical Surgical Nursing (I, II), Critical Nursing, Maternity and Gynecology, Pediatric, Community Health, Psychiatric and Mental Health nursing, and Nursing Administration.

3. The study's subjects:

The research population consisted of 267 out of 875 nursing students enrolled in

their 1st and 4th academic years throughout the academic year (2022-2023). The selection was made using a simple method of random sampling.

- First group: nursing students in their first year:

Out of 608 nursing students, 186 were qualified to take part in the research.

-Second group: Nursing students in their fourth year:

Out of 267 nursing students, 81 were qualified to take part in the research.

4. Data collecting tools:

Two instruments, the Peer Support Questionnaire (PSQ) and the Academic Engagement Scale, were used to gather data for this research.

First tool: peer support Questionnaire (PSQ):

This measure was designed to assess nursing students' perception regarding peer support. There were two parts of it.

▪ Part I

personal characteristics: This section focuses on gathering information on the personal characteristics of nursing students, such as their age, gender, marital status, place of residence, prior educational background, academic year, participation in college youth care activities, interests, and decision to join the Faculty.

▪ Part II:

It was developed by *Alaei & Hosseinnezhad (2021)*. The researcher also made modifications. This section is separated into five categories: informational support, emotional support, instrumental support, validation, feedback, and companion support.

❖ System of scoring:

Participants' responses were graded on a scale of 1 to 5 From strongly agree to agree to neutral to disagree to strongly disagree on a 5 points Likert scale. Strongly concurring received a "5" while strongly disagreeing

received a "1" The scores for negative terms were inverted. A mean score is obtained by adding the scores of each item. If the final score was less than 60 percent, study participants had low perception of peer support. While a total score of between 60% and 75% is considered moderate level, a score of more than 75% is considered high level (*Joshi et al, 2015*).

Second tool: Academic engagement scale:

It aimed to assess academic engagement level among nursing students. **Freda et al. created it (2021)**. and was modified by the researcher. It was broken down into six subscales: organizational value and feeling of belonging, perception of capacity to stay with organization of choice, importance of course, interaction with professors (teaching staff), interaction with peers, and links between organization and relational net.

❖ Scoring method:

Participants' responses were recorded on a 5-point scale. The Likert scale has five options: Always, Usually, sometimes, Rarely, and Never. Always awarded a "5", never a "1."The score was flipped for the negative terms. A mean score is obtained after adding up all the things. Those study participants who had a total score of less than 60% showed low academic engagement level. While a score of between 60 and 75 percent considered moderate level and more than 75 percent is considered high level (*Joshi et al, 2015*).

Content Validity:

The draft form for the data collection instrument was offered to a jury panel for face and content evaluation. Five experts in nursing administration and psychiatric mental health nursing from Ain Shams University and two associate professors from the nursing administration department made up the jury panel. (Three professors from psychiatric mental health nursing department). They were asked for their general or overall evaluation of the data gathering tools.

Each tool's clarity, thoroughness, simplicity, comprehension, and application

were evaluated. According on the jury's verdicts, the researcher made changes such rephrasing, adding, or omitting information.

The reliability:

By evaluating their internal consistency, data collecting tools were reviewed. By Cronbach Alpha. For the peer support questionnaire, the result was 0.988. For academic engagement scale, the result was 0.965.

Administrative design:

To get approval to carry out the research and choose an appropriate time to meet with the students, a letter for the data collecting process was sent to the head of each scientific department. To get their approval to carry out the research and choose an appropriate time to meet with the students, The researcher explained the importance of the study and the implication of expected results for the study subjects.

Field work:

After obtaining agreement to conduct the study, the researcher met the selected students both individually or through group meeting and explained the aim of the study. Distribution of the study tool was done, and they were collected at the same time after completion.

The study's actual fieldwork took place over the course of two months, from the beginning of November to the end of December 2022. The researcher coordinated with the organizers of the nursing courses to determine the best time to gather data. Researcher introduced herself to the nursing students before describing the purpose and elements of the data collecting instruments. The researcher apportioned participants into groups. Each group consisted of 20-25 students. Data was collected three days/week depending on the timetable of each grade. The questionnaire took (30-40) minutes. Data was collected in classrooms before and after lectures, after lab time and in canceled lectures. Each completed questionnaire form was double-checked by the researcher to confirm its accuracy.

Results:

Table (1): reveals that more than half (57.5%) of first year nursing students had 18 years with total mean 17.83 ± 2.21 . Slightly more than two thirds of them (68.8%) were female. Also, the majority of the studied first year nursing students (86.6%) were from urban areas. All of them were single and had secondary education. Likewise, more than one third of them (38.2%) were entry the college based on their score. Also, more than three quarters (79.0%) of them did not participate in youth welfare activities. Moreover, less than two thirds of them (60.2%) had hobbies.

Table (2): Shows that more than two thirds of fourth year nursing students (67.9%) had 22 years with total mean 22.12 ± 1.24 . More than two fifth of them (45.7%) were female. Also, more than half of them (56.8%) were from urban areas. The majority (86.4%) of fourth year nursing students were single. Also, more than two thirds of them (71.6%) had secondary education. Slightly two fifths of study subjects (44.4%) were entry the college based on their score. Also, more than three quarters of them (76.5%) did not participate in youth welfare activities. Moreover, more than half of them (53.1%) had hobbies.

Figure (1): Shows that half (50%) of first year nursing students had low perception level of peer support and less than one fifth (19.9%) of them had high perception level. While the minority (6.2%) of fourth year nursing students had moderate perception level of peer support and the majority (93.8%) of them had high perception level.

Figure (2): Shows that nearly half (46.3%) of first year nursing students had low level of academic engagement and the near quarter (24.7%) of them had high level. While the minority (4.9%) of fourth year nursing students had moderate level of academic engagement and the majority (95.1%) of them had high level.

Table (3): concludes that social support and academic engagement among first-year nursing students showed a statistically

significant strong positive correlation (R=0.953, P=0.000).

Table (4) concludes that among fourth-year nursing students, there was a statistically significant strong positive correlation (R=0.867, P=0.000) between peer support and academic engagement.

Table (5): Shows that peer support had statistically significant independent positive

predictor for academic engagement. None of the other first year nursing students' personal characteristics had statistically significant influence on this score except residence.

Table (6): Shows that peer support had statistically significant positive predictor for academic engagement. None of the other fourth year nursing students' personal characteristics had statistically significant influence on this score except residence.

Table (1): Personal characteristic of first year nursing students in the study sample (n=186).

personal characteristics	No	%
Age		
17-	79	42.5
18	107	57.5
Mean and SD	17.83±2.21	
Range	17-18	
Gender		
Male	58	31.2
Female	128	68.8
Residence		
Urban	161	86.6
Rural	25	13.4
Marital status		
Single	186	100
Educational level pre university		
Secondary school	186	100
Reason for college entrance		
My own	65	34.9
Total score	71	38.2
Both	50	26.9
Membership in youth welfare activities		
Yes	39	21.0
No	147	79.0
Have hobbies		
Yes	74	39.8
No	112	60.2

Table (2): Personal characteristics of fourth year nursing students in the study sample (n=81).

Personal characteristics	No	%
Age		
22-	55	67.9
23	26	32.1
Mean and SD	22.12±1.24	
Range	22-23	
Gender		
Male	44	54.3
Female	37	45.7
Residence		
Urban	46	56.8
Rural	35	43.2
Marital status		
Single	70	86.4
Married	11	13.6
Educational level pre university		
Secondary school	58	71.6
Technical Institute	23	28.4
Class		
Psychiatric nursing	37	45.7
Community health Nursing	44	54.3
Reason for college entrance		
My own	18	22.2
Total score	36	44.4
Both	27	33.4
Membership of youth welfare activities		
Yes	19	23.5
No	62	76.5
Have hobbies		
Yes	38	46.9
No	43	53.1

Figure (1): Frequency distribution of first- and fourth-year nursing students' total perception regarding peer support.

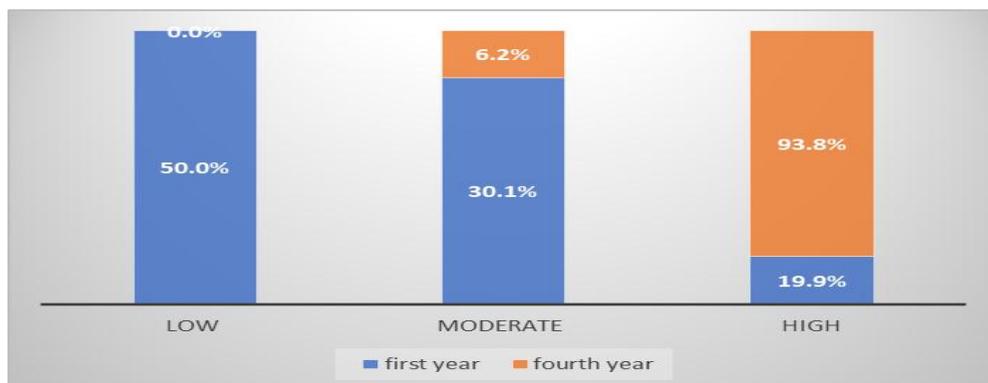


Figure (2): Frequency distribution of first- and fourth-year nursing students' total level regarding Academic Engagement.

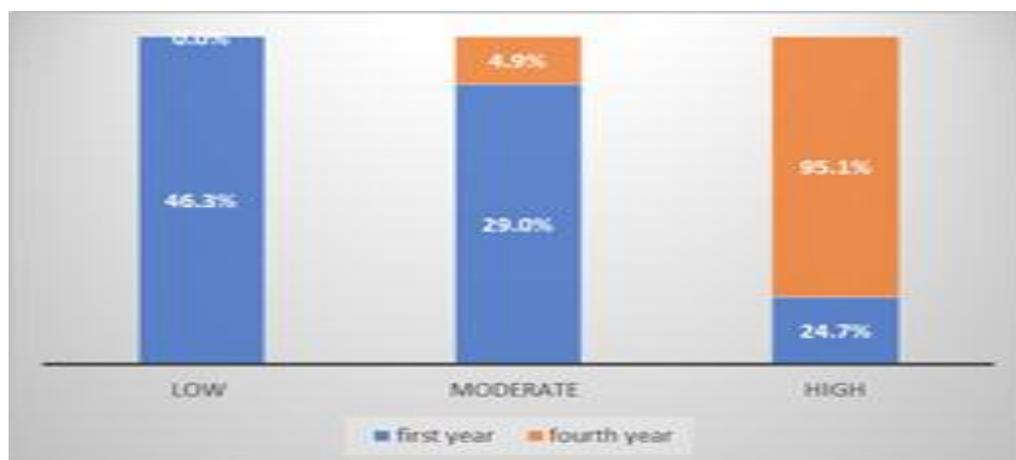


Table (3): Correlation coefficient between peer support and academic engagement among first year nursing students.

variable	Academic Engagement	
	First year	
	r	P value
Peer Support	0.953**	0.000**

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table (4): Correlation coefficient between peer support and academic engagement among fourth year nursing students

variable	Academic Engagement	
	Fourth year	
	r	P value
Peer Support	0.867**	0.000**

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table (5): multiple linear regression model between academic engagement, personal characteristics, and peer support among first year nursing students.

Independent variable	Beta Coefficient	Standard error	T values	P values	Model unadjusted R2; adjusted R2; P value
Age	.009	1.094	.379	.705	
Gender	-.024	1.142	-1.076	.283	
Residence	.053	1.542	2.382	.018*	
Reason for college entrance	.016	.681	.698	.486	
Member of youth welfare activities	-.003	1.292	-.116	.908	
Have hobbies	-.001	1.103	-.023	.982	
Peer Support	.951	.023	42.400	.000**	
(Constant)		20.259	.789	.431	.912, .909,

Table (6): multiple linear regression model between academic engagement, personal characteristics, and peer support among fourth year nursing students.

Independent variable	Beta Coefficient	Standard error	T values	P values	Model unadjusted R2; adjusted R2; P value
Age	-.063	1.915	-.717	.476	
Gender	.025	1.234	.410	.683	
Residence	-.027	1.261	-.446	.657	
Marital status	-.008	1.877	-.130	.897	
Educational level pre university	.113	2.128	1.197	.235	
Class	-.085	1.190	-1.460	.149	
Reason for college entrance	-.008	.850	-.137	.892	
Member of youth welfare activities	-.042	1.421	-.711	.479	
Have hobbies	.058	1.305	.898	.372	
Peer Support	.870	.070	14.771	.000**	
(Constant)		41.157	1.650	.103	.772, .739,

Discussion:

Peer support emphasizes personal qualities and may be considered as a personal resource that can help students succeed in a demanding academic environment. Peer support seems to be a key factor in predicting students' academic achievement, contentment, and involvement with their faculty (Cowie et al, 2020).

Peer support is consistently correlated with academic engagement, which has improved outcomes like general abilities, critical thinking, and student satisfaction. Students with high peer support also have positive effects on their academic performance, including engagement that leads to better learning and personal achievement as measured by academic performance and persistence (Estell & Perdue, 2023). The present study aimed to assess the influence of peer support on academic engagement among nursing students.

The results of the frequency distribution of first- and fourth-year nursing students' overall impression of peer support reveal that fewer than a fifth of first-year nursing students had high perception level, and that half had poor perception level. On the other hand, the minority of fourth year nursing students had moderate perception level. While the majority of them had high perception level of peer support.

According to the researcher view, this result could be the result of older pupils being exposed to peer support interactions during lectures., participation in the presentation and practical interaction in the hospital, so they were get highly practices peer support more than students of first year.

These results were agreed with the study carried out by (Kef & Dekovic', 2020). Who found that around half of first year nursing students had low perception of peer support. While the fourth-year nursing students which represent the majority of studied sample had high perception level of peer support.

Nearly half of first year nursing students had low academic engagement level and nearly quarter of them had high level. On the other hand, the minority of fourth year nursing students had moderate academic engagement level and the majority of them had high level.

This may be attributed to, older pupils showed greater levels of engagement, older students' ability and confidence with interpersonal skills developed more across life experiences compared to younger. So, older nursing students are engaged more than younger students.

These results are in the same line with (Ghasemi & Moonaghi& Heydari, 2020) & (Zhang, 2019). Who found that near half of first year nursing students had low level of academic engagement while the majority of fourth year nursing students had high level.

Regarding the correlation coefficient between peer support and academic engagement among nursing students, study results show that there was statistically significant strongly positive correlation between peer support and academic engagement among first year nursing students.

This result may be explained by the fact that student academic engagement and peer support have a favorable relationship. The belief that one of the major variables affecting students' academic engagement is peer support. Students who get more support from their classmates are more engaged.

These results in agreement with (Worley et al, 2023). Who found that there was statistically significant strongly positive correlation between peer support and academic engagement among nursing students.

According to the represented research findings, there was a statistically significant highly positive association between peer support and academic engagement among fourth nursing students with regard to the correlation coefficient between peer support and academic engagement among nursing students.

This data supports the study hypothesis, that peer support has an impact on nursing students' academic engagement. Students with higher peer support have higher academic engagement in learning.

These results in agreement with (Rezvan et al, 2016). Who found that there was statistically significant strongly positive correlation between peer support and academic engagement among nursing students.

Regarding the relationship between the studied variables. Among first- and fourth-year nursing students, the results of the current study showed a highly statistically significant relationship between academic engagement, personal characteristics, and peer support. These characteristics included age, gender, place of residence, reason for entering college, participation in youth welfare activities, and hobbies. From the researcher point of view, this result may be due to a strong relationship affecting students' acceptance, and attitudes regarding using peer support and academic engagement.

On agreement with the study finding (Ejigu & Belay, 2022) & (Shao & Kang, 2022). Who found that there was a highly statistically significant relation between academic engagement, personal characteristics, and peer support such as age, gender, residence, reason for college entrance, member of youth welfare activities and have hobbies.

Conclusion:

There were highly statistically significant correlations between the variables evaluated and the personal characteristics of nursing students, such as age, gender, place of residence, purpose for enrolling in college, and participation in youth welfare activities and have hobbies ... there was a very strong positive association between nursing students' academic engagement and their peer support. These results corroborate the study hypothesis, which claimed that peer support had an influence on nursing students' academic engagement.

Recommendation:

The following suggestions are put forward considering the study's results:

- Establish a welcoming and encouraging learning atmosphere for nursing students.
- Utilize nursing students' opinions to make decisions regarding academic and extracurricular activity.
- Hold regular counseling sessions to assist students in expressing their feelings about their learning environment, and respect their thoughts, worries, and ideas.
- Apply different teaching / learning techniques and strategies in the classrooms, such as leading and coaching, game-based learning.
- Each students have to be oriented with oblige to their rights and responsibility which is disseminated by the faculty

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