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Student Nurse Experiences of Retention Strategies and the Perceived Contribution to Academic Progress

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This is to certify that the doctoral dissertation by

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has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
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Walden University
2024

Abstract

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MN, Athabasca University, 2013

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Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

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August 2024

Abstract

There is a worldwide nursing shortage that has been heightened by the COVID-19 pandemic. Several factors have contributed to the worsening shortage, including high attrition rates in nursing programs. Retention strategies have been suggested to support nursing students during their education to have success and graduate. The purpose of this descriptive qualitative study was to explore how nursing students experience retention strategies and their perceived contributions to academic progress. Bandura's social cognitive theory was the theoretical framework used to guide the study. Data were collected from one-on-one interviews with 12 nursing students recruited using purposeful and snowball sampling. Data were thematically analyzed to reveal categories and themes. Three themes emerged: finding balance in personal life and academia, visualization of success, and a sense of belonging. Findings suggest that student-centered activities, social relationships, enhanced orientation, student support services, and learning accommodations greatly contributed to academic progress. Results may lead to positive social change as nursing programs recognize effective strategies to support nursing students and reduce attrition.

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my three children and my husband who have been understanding and supportive throughout this journey. Thank you for always providing endless support and asking for updates on my progress. Thank you for understanding the importance of completing my doctoral journey.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my children, Jack, Walker, and Harper. Your endless support and enthusiasm during my studies were so encouraging. Each of you inspired me in various ways throughout this process. I am so proud to be your mom and will always be proud of everything you do. I hope that you always believe in yourself; you can do anything.

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Thank you to my family and friends who have supported me throughout this journey—special thanks to Carley, Justine, Krista, and Nichole. Your support and encouragement were always appreciated. You were the best cheering squad, especially when I needed it the most. Thank you to my colleagues and friends, Barbie and Kim; I appreciated your support and positivity throughout this process.

Thank you, Dr Long. I am so thankful to have had you as a supervisor. I will always appreciate the extra support, guidance, and words of encouragement. You helped to shape my research, and I will be forever grateful for your kind words.

Thank you, Dr Bailey. I truly appreciate your feedback and input during this process. Your insight into qualitative research was profound, and I appreciate the expertise shared to assist in the development of my research.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Nursing shortages are a worldwide concern contributing to unsafe staffing ratios, medication errors, hospital-associated infections, and decreased patient access to care (Garside et al., 2021; Ross, 2022). According to Everett (2020), the nursing shortage is expected to increase significantly as the world enters the postpandemic period. To address the nursing shortage, it is imperative that an adequate number of nurses graduate from nursing programs and gain employment within the health care system. Priode et al. (2020) found that attrition rates within nursing programs vary; however, they may reach over 50% within associate degree programs. The high attrition rates may prove costly and contribute to the supply and demand of nurses (K. Mitchell et al., 2021). Retention strategies are suggested to support nursing students during their education to gain success and ultimately graduate.

While enrolled in nursing programs, students face various obstacles such as learning diversity, maladaptation to program expectations, and personal and academic factors that may affect academic progress (Brown et al., 2021; Everett, 2020). These obstacles contribute to student retention. Bumby (2020) found a significant number of suggested retention strategies for nursing programs including an extended orientation, peer and faculty mentorship programs, enhanced faculty engagement, and enriched teaching approaches. Although it is beneficial to have access to information regarding retention strategies, it may be difficult for organizations to select the best strategies for implementation without further knowledge and understanding of retention strategies and their effects on academic progress.

Because the retention of nursing students within nursing programs is important, it was necessary to gain a better understanding of retention strategies and their perceived contribution to academic progress. In this study, I explored how nursing students experience retention strategies and how they perceive their contribution to academic progress. The social implications of this study are that faculty may be better equipped to advocate for student success using retention strategies. Knowledge gained may assist organizations in the implementation of strategies to ensure program progress because it may be difficult for organizations to commit to the implementation of multiple strategies due to financial and personnel implications. Furthermore, if nursing students are successful in their nursing program and complete the National Council Licensure Examination (NCLEX) the community and society may benefit from an increased number of registered nurses to mitigate the ongoing nursing shortage.

This chapter provides additional background information on the topic. The study's problem statement, purpose, and research question are outlined. The theoretical framework and nature of the study are discussed. Key terms, assumptions, delimitations, and limitations are defined, and the significance of the study is explained.

Background

Student retention has been studied by researchers including Burleson et al. (2023), Collard et al. (2020), Cross and Rogers (2022), and Ebert et al. (2021); however, little is known about student nurses' experience of retention strategies and how student nurses perceive the contributions to academic progress (K. Mitchell et al., 2021). Researchers suggested various retention strategies including an extended orientation period, peer and

faculty mentorship programs, enhanced faculty engagement, and enriched teaching approaches; however, this information can be overwhelming because little clarity and evidence are provided (Bumby, 2020). Within organizations, retention strategies are available to students, yet selection and application are optional and based on student choice and preference (Smith-Wacholz et al., 2019). Although students may be presented with various strategies, those deemed beneficial vary, and organizations may be presented with barriers to implementation such as financial and personnel implications (Ebert et al., 2021). Further research may assist in guiding student selection of retention strategies to improve program progress and success.

Researchers have considered various factors that contribute to retention, yet the effect of retention strategies such as peer tutoring and faculty mentoring in relation to academic progress is not well known (Priode et al., 2020). Knowledge regarding student experiences of retention strategies and their contribution to academic progress may be beneficial to organizations because it may improve understanding of the student nurses' experience and provide information regarding strategy effectiveness and utilization. Furthermore, knowledge regarding student experiences of retention strategies and their contribution to academic progress may assist organizations in the implementation of strategies that are more likely to contribute to student success, providing for efficiencies in the allocation of human and other related resources and promoting fiscal efficiency and cost reduction. The identified gap focused on the need for further understanding of student experiences of retention strategies and the perceived contributions to academic progress.

Problem Statement

The retention of nurses has gained considerable interest in recent years due to the ongoing nursing shortage (A. Mitchell & Maykut, 2021). In 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) estimated an ongoing global nursing shortage of 5.9 million. The nursing shortage is considered alarming and potentially damaging to the health of numerous populations because nursing shortages contribute to unsafe staffing ratios, medication errors, decreased patient access to hospital care, and hospital-associated infections (Garside et al., 2021; Ross, 2022). According to Everett (2020), as the world enters the postpandemic period, the nursing shortage is expected to increase. To combat the nursing shortage, it is imperative that an adequate number of nurses graduate from nursing programs and gain employment within the health care system.

Within nursing programs, students face various obstacles such as learning diversity, adaptation to program expectations, and personal and academic factors that may affect academic progress (Brown et al., 2021; Everett, 2020). The retention of nursing students is a concern that can prove costly and contribute to the supply and demand of nurses (K. Mitchell et al., 2021). Attrition rates within nursing programs are an ongoing consideration, and although they vary, rates may reach over 50% within associate degree programs (Priode et al., 2020). Retention strategies are suggested to enhance student success and academic progress.

Nursing student retention can be defined as a student returning to the enrolled institution for the next year of studies as expected within a progression plan (Leary et al., 2020). There are a significant number of suggested retention strategies including an

extended orientation, peer and faculty mentorship programs, enhanced faculty engagement, and enriched teaching approaches (Bumby, 2020). Although it is beneficial to have access to information regarding retention strategies, it may be difficult for organizations to select the best strategies for implementation without further knowledge and understanding of retention strategies and their effects on academic progress. There is a need to create a more comprehensive understanding of retention strategies and their contribution to academic progress (K. Mitchell et al., 2021). Because retention strategies are used by students, it would be beneficial to create a better understanding of student experiences of retention strategies and their perceived contribution to academic progress. Knowledge gained may assist organizations in the implementation of strategies to ensure academic progress as it may be difficult for organizations to commit to the implementation of multiple strategies due to financial and personnel implications. The social problem that guided this study was the worldwide nursing shortage heightened by the pandemic and the high attrition rates in nursing programs that contribute to the worsening shortage.

Purpose

The purpose of this descriptive qualitative study was to explore how nursing students experience retention strategies and their perceived contribution to academic progress. Within educational organizations, retention strategies are available to nursing students; however, selection and implementation are often based on student choice and preference (Smith-Wacholz et al., 2019). Through the exploration of students' experiences of retention strategies and their contribution to academic progress, future

recommendations were made, which may enhance student retention. Recent literature focused on suggested retention strategies and their effectiveness based on student retention and attrition rates; however, retention based on nursing student experience remains a gap (Priode et al., 2020).

Research Question

How do nursing students experience retention strategies in relation to academic progress?

Theoretical Framework

Bandura's (1977) social cognitive theory (SCT) was used to guide the current study. Bandura's SCT has been tested throughout the decades and can be used to explain and predict psychological changes when an individual is presented with an unfavorable experience. Major concepts within SCT include reciprocal determinism, behavioral capacity, observational learning, reinforcements, expectations, and self-efficacy (Wulfert, 2021). Additional related concepts include motivation, imitation, and confidence, which are discussed in relation to self-efficacy and learning (McEwen & Wills, 2019; Wulfert, 2021).

SCT was applicable as a framework to guide the study because it functions under the premise that an individual's behavior is affected by the expectation of the future, a belief in oneself, and intentions. Furthermore, SCT discusses the reciprocal influence of the self, environment, and behavior (Carlson et al. 2020; Kearney & Garfield, 2019). SCT has been used to predict student achievement when high expectations and an orderly environment are present. These factors are relevant and applicable to student retention.

Furthermore, SCT focuses on self-efficacy, which is defined as the individual's judgment of their capacity of actions that guide behavior (Bandura, 1977). Within SCT, the relationship between self-efficacy and its effect on social network and norms is discussed (Carlson et al., 2020). This provides further insight into the relationship between self-efficacy and nursing student retention.

SCT can explain retention strategy selection because it is based on the assumption that learning occurs within a social context. Within nursing programs, students are subjected to various social contexts, and gaining further information regarding the reciprocal relationship between the person, environment, and behavior would be beneficial (Wulfert, 2021). It was necessary to narrow the focus of SCT to apply SCT, which is noted to be vague in the literature (Kearney & Garfield, 2019; Wulfert, 2021). This included modifications to ensure equality between the three reciprocal factors, which could be accomplished by further defining social, cognitive, and behavioral factors. Furthermore, SCT does not consider emotion and varied responses within individuals (Wulfelt, 2021). It was beneficial to further delineate and define these responses within modifications to ensure this was captured in relation to the target population.

Nature of the Study

To address the research question in this qualitative study, the research design was descriptive with semistructured interviews to gain knowledge of student experiences related to retention strategies and the perceived contribution to academic progress within nursing programs (see Lott & Davis, 2018). A qualitative design allowed for the

description of life experiences and social processes through the perspectives of the group involved (see Gray & Grove, 2021). The research question guided the study by aiming to gain insight into retention strategies used by nursing students and their perceived effectiveness on academic progress. I explored the phenomenon of retention. Retention was defined as the percentage of college students who enroll during a fall term of 1 year and remain enrolled at the institution the fall term of the following year (Shelton, 2012). Retention rates are indicative of student success within nursing programs, which contributes to the shortage of nurses (Ebert et al., 2021).

Nursing students enrolled in a registered practical nurse (RPN) program were recruited for this study. An interview guide with open-ended questions was developed to allow for the gathering of information specific to the use of retention strategies and academic progress. This information may be beneficial for educators and educational institutions when designing and facilitating the implementation of retention strategies for associate degree nursing students. The literature described a large number of retention strategies (Bumby, 2020, Connelly et al., 2019; Diefenbeck & Klemm, 2021; and Ebert et al., 2021) that are noted to be beneficial; however, there is a need to add understanding from the lens of the students as to which strategies are selected and deemed successful.

Definitions

Common terms used in this study were defined as follows:

Academic progress: Progress requirements establish the minimum level of achievement for students to continue at the university and graduate (University of Western Ontario, n.d.).

Attrition: In undergraduate nursing students, attrition is defined as discontinuation of an educational program before the student has completed the requirements regardless of reason (Wells, 2003).

Nursing student: An individual who is enrolled in a nursing educational program (College of Nurses of Ontario, n.d.).

Retention: Persistence, or choosing to continue in a nursing program, and successful academic performance, or meeting the necessary academic standards to continue in a nursing program (Shelton, 2012).

Assumptions

Assumptions are aspects of the study that are believed to be true but cannot be verified. A qualitative research design allows for the description of life experiences and social processes through the perspectives of the group (Gray & Grove, 2021). In the current study, I assumed that participants would answer the interview questions honestly and openly in describing their experience of retention strategies and the perceived contribution to academic progress. During the semistructured interviews, qualitative methodology allowed me to gain subjective knowledge regarding participants' lived experiences (see Ravitch & Carl, 2021). I assumed that my lived experience may influence the interpretation of data. Although steps were taken to reduce bias, it was necessary to acknowledge me as an active part of this qualitative study (see Ravitch & Carl, 2021).

Scope and Delimitations

I conducted a qualitative descriptive study to explore students' experiences of retention strategies and the perceived contribution to academic progress. I selected a qualitative descriptive design because it aligned with the research question. Furthermore, this design allowed for the exploration and description of the concepts of nursing school retention strategies and academic progress to create further understanding in reference to a purposeful sampled group of nursing students. Through development of knowledge and understanding regarding nursing students' experiences of retention strategies and the perceived contribution to academic progress, these findings may be applied to improve retention in other undergraduate programs. Undergraduate programs may use the findings of this study to enhance retention programs and strategies offered within their organizations. Although a descriptive design was selected for this study, a phenomenological design was also considered to focus on the phenomenon of retention strategies and student success. I did not select a phenomenological design because I wanted to focus on the student experience of retention strategies and the perceived contribution to academic progress.

The theoretical framework chosen to guide this study was Bandura's SCT; however, Tinto's theory of student retention was also considered. Tinto's framework proposed that students are influenced by both social and academic factors related to persistence within their programs (K. Mitchell et al., 2021). To enhance retention, Tinto stated that students must feel affiliated with both social and academic systems (Tinto, 1993, as cited in K. Mitchell et al., 2021). According to Mooring (2016) and K. Mitchell

et al. (2021), strategies that were effective in combating retention were included within the academic system, such as tutoring and mentoring, as well as the social system, such as social engagements and participation. Tinto's theory focuses on student retention in relation to social and academic systems, and SCT focuses on the belief that within nursing programs, students are subjected to various social contexts; therefore, gaining further information regarding the reciprocal relationship between the person, environment, and behavior would be beneficial.

Limitations

The data for this study were collected through one-on-one semistructured interviews. If the participants were not honest in describing their experiences with retention strategies, the data would not be accurate, which may be a limitation. Although participants were recruited from the RPN program, my role as a faculty member within the Bachelor of Science in Nursing program could be a limitation. Participants may not have felt comfortable discussing their experience of retention strategies with me. Furthermore, students who were unsuccessful in the program were difficult to access. The findings of this study may be applicable to undergraduate programs and may have limited application to graduate programs. In addition, the findings were specific to an undergraduate program in Canada, making transferability limited to other geographic locations. To enhance transferability, students were recruited from either year of the program to participate in the study. In the development of the interview guide, resources from other specialty areas were included because student retention is comparable in undergraduate programs. In addition, detailed descriptions of the data and the context

were included so that readers would be able to make comparisons (see Ravitch & Carl, 2021). It was imperative to avoid personal bias when conducting research using one-on-one interviews. I practiced reflexivity by journaling to identify personal connections and biases throughout data collection and analysis.

Significance

The research question guided the study by aiming to gain insight into retention strategies used by nursing students and their perceived effects on academic progress. This information may be beneficial for educators and educational organizations when designing and facilitating the implementation of retention strategies. In addition, educational organizations may use this knowledge to develop policies related to the implementation of retention strategies, including mandatory referral to retention programs. Educational organizations may enhance the offering of retention strategies based on the current findings. Bumby (2020) identified numerous retention strategies that were suggested for use in nursing programs; however, there was a need to further this understanding from the lens of the students regarding which strategies were selected and deemed successful. Retention strategies were a focus of Priode et al. (2020), who identified the significance of the student perspective and the need for further research to identify the effects of retention strategies on academic progress. Priode et al. stated that a variety of academic and nonacademic factors contribute to retention and the influence toward academic progress. The current study may provide insight into retention strategy use and its perceived effects on academic progress by focusing on the student perspective.

The potential social implications of this study are that faculty may be better equipped to advocate for student success using retention strategies. Knowledge gained may assist organizations in the implementation of strategies to ensure program progress because it may be difficult for organizations to commit to the implementation of multiple strategies due to financial and personnel implications. Furthermore, if nursing students are successful in their nursing program and complete the NCLEX, the community, and society may benefit from an increased number of registered nurses to mitigate the ongoing nursing shortage.

Summary

Health care organizations require nurses to function effectively in providing safe, competent care to patients. The attrition of nursing students affects the nursing workforce. Without adequate nursing staff, organizations may have unsafe staffing ratios, medication errors, hospital-associated infections, and decreased patient access to care (Garside et al., 2021; Priode et al., 2020). The intent of the current study was to explore nursing student experiences of retention strategies and their perceived contribution to academic progress. The need for retention strategies was established in this chapter. In Chapter 2, I outline the literature search strategy, provide a description of the theoretical framework, and present a synthesis of the relevant literature.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The nursing shortage is considered alarming and potentially damaging to the health of numerous populations because nursing shortages contribute to unsafe staffing ratios, medication errors, decreased patient access to hospital care, and hospital-associated infections (Garside et al., 2021; Ross, 2022). According to Everett (2020), the nursing shortage is expected to increase significantly as the world enters the postpandemic period. To help fill this nursing shortage, it is imperative that an adequate number of nurses graduate from nursing programs and gain employment within the health care system. Retention and attrition rates within nursing programs are an ongoing consideration, and although they vary, rates can reach over 50% within associate degree programs (Priode et al., 2020).

The retention of nursing students is a concern that can prove costly and contributes to the supply and demand of nurses (K. Mitchell et al., 2021). While enrolled in nursing programs, students face various obstacles such as learning diversity, adaptation to program expectations, and personal and academic factors that may affect academic progress (Brown et al., 2021; Everett, 2020). These obstacles contribute to student retention. There are a significant number of suggested retention strategies including an extended orientation, peer and faculty mentorship programs, enhanced faculty engagement, and enriched teaching approaches (Bumby, 2020). Although it is beneficial to have access to information regarding retention strategies, it can be difficult for organizations to select specific strategies for implementation without further knowledge and understanding of retention strategies and their effects on academic progress.

Previous research focused on the effectiveness of retention strategies using data to support findings. This created a gap because little is known about student nurses' experience of retention strategies and how student nurses perceive the contributions to academic progress (K. Mitchell et al., 2021). Bumby (2020), Connelly et al. (2019), Diefenbeck and Klemm (2021), and Ebert et al. (2021) suggested an extensive amount of retention strategies including an extended orientation period, peer and faculty mentorship programs, enhanced faculty engagement, and enriched teaching approaches; however; this information can be overwhelming because little clarity and evidence is provided. There is a need to create a comprehensive understanding of retention strategies and their contribution to academic progress (K. Mitchell et al., 2021). Because retention strategies are used by students, it would be beneficial to improve understanding of student experiences of retention strategies and their perceived contributions to academic progress. Knowledge gained may assist organizations in the implementation of strategies to ensure program progress because it may be difficult for organizations to commit to the implementation of multiple strategies due to financial and personnel implications. In this research, I sought to fill the gap in the literature regarding student experiences of retention strategies and the perceived contribution to academic progress. The purpose of this study was to explore how nursing students experience retention strategies and the perceived contribution to academic progress. Through exploration of students' experiences of retention strategies and their contribution to academic progress, recommendations can be made to enhance student retention.

In previous studies, researchers used both qualitative and quantitative methods to study nursing student retention. Studies that used a quantitative method included the application of the SPA-R 27-item tool and the Academic Success Inventory for College Students survey tool (Brown et al., 2021; Priode et al., 2020). Studies that used a qualitative method focused on student experience and preference in relation to retention strategies and the lived experience of nursing school including stressors and their effects on retention. In the current study, I used qualitative methodology with an individual interview format using open-ended questions to gather information on nursing students' experience of retention strategies and the perceived contribution to academic progress.

In this chapter, I explain the strategy used to search the literature by identifying the words, terms, databases, and processes used for finding articles relevant to this study. I then describe Bandura's SCT and expand on its main concepts and relation to this study. Furthermore, I outline the key concepts of this study and elaborate on these concepts using information that is currently known about nursing student retention. Finally, I summarize the main content from the chapter and discuss how this study filled a gap in the literature.

Literature Search Strategy

To locate relevant articles, I conducted electronic searches using the Cumulative Index to Nursing and Allied Health Literature, Medline, Ovid Nursing Journals, ProQuest Nursing and Allied Health, and Science Direct databases. Electronic searches were completed using the time frame of 2018 through 2023. The following keywords were used in the search: *student nurses* OR *nursing students* OR *student nurse* OR *nursing*

student OR *undergraduate nurse* AND *student retention* OR *student attrition* OR *student turnover* AND *student success* OR *academic achievement*. Additionally, the terms *student retention*, *student success*, and *academic progression* were searched individually within the databases. Also, I reviewed the reference lists from relevant articles to locate further articles. In addition, I conducted literature searches to locate articles on Bandura's SCT and research that applied this theory. The articles selected were written in the English language and were peer reviewed. A total of 32 articles were included in the theoretical framework and literature review.

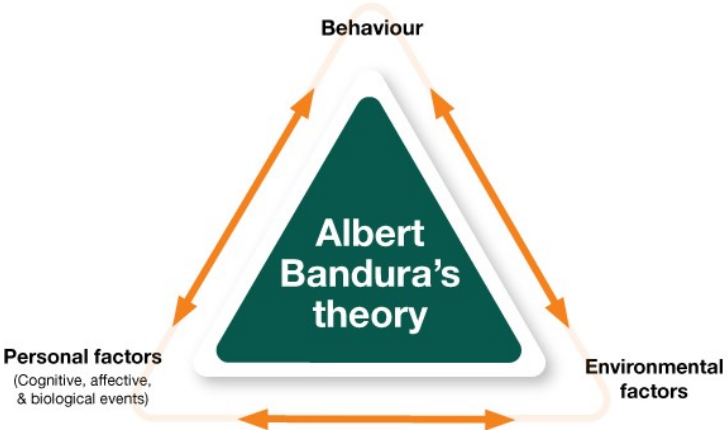
Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework used for this study was Bandura's SCT. Bandura's theory was founded as social learning theory in the 1960s. In 1986, social learning theory was developed into SCT, which describes the assumptions that learning occurs within a social context and involves a reciprocal relationship between the person, environment, and behavior (Wulfert, 2021; see Figure 1). Bandura's (1977) SCT has been tested throughout the decades and can be used to explain and predict psychological changes when an individual is presented with an unfavorable experience. Bandura's theory was applicable to the current study because it functioned under the premise that an individual's behavior is affected by the expectation of the future, a belief in oneself, and intentions. The underpinnings of SCT provided valuable implications toward nursing education and the development of nursing students. In relation to student nurses, SCT maintains the assumption that learning occurs within a social context and involves a reciprocal relationship between the person, environment, and behavior (Carlson et al.

2020; Kearney & Garfield, 2019; Wulfert, 2021). Within nursing programs, students are subjected to various social contexts; therefore, gaining further information regarding the reciprocal relationship between the person, environment, and behavior would be beneficial (Wulfert, 2021). This knowledge may assist in enhancing the learning experience and outcomes for nursing students related to retention.

Figure 1

Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory



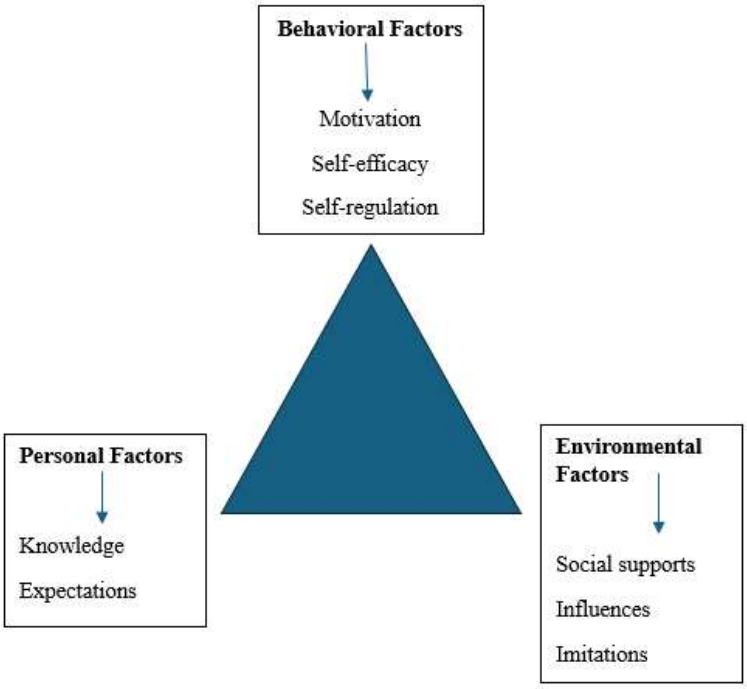
SCT has been used to predict student achievement when high expectations and an orderly environment are present. These factors are relevant and applicable to student retention. Furthermore, SCT focuses on self-efficacy, which is defined as the individual's judgment of their capacity of actions that guide behavior (Bandura, 1977). Within SCT, the relationship between self-efficacy and its effect on social network and norms is discussed (Carlson et al., 2020). This provides further insight into the relationship between self-efficacy and nursing student retention. SCT can explain retention strategy selection because it is based on the assumption that learning occurs within a social context. Major concepts within SCT refer to behavioral, personal, and environmental

factors (Wulfert, 2021). In relation to the current study, related concepts found within SCT included motivation, self-efficacy, social support, influences, imitation, knowledge, and expectations (see McEwen & Wills, 2019; Wulfert, 2021). Additionally, concepts included reciprocal determinism, behavior capacity, observational learning, and reinforcements (see Wulfert, 2021).

SCT can help researchers understand behavioral change and educational interventions, both of which are relevant in understanding student retention. SCT uses the concepts of behavioral, environmental, and personal factors to explain how individuals acquire new behaviors and skills (Wulfert, 2021). Behavioral factors included motivation, self-efficacy, and self-regulation in relation to the current study. However, additional concepts included role modeling, definition, and vicarious reinforcement (see Bandura, 1977). In addition, environmental factors referred to factors that contribute to behavior development (see Wulfert, 2021). In relation to the current study, social support, imitation, and influences were concepts that contribute to student retention. Personal or cognitive factors are significant in creating learning experiences for students in undergraduate education. Personal factors include the concepts of knowledge and expectations (Bandura, 1977; see Figure 2). Bandura (2018) noted that human behavior is driven by the three previously discussed factors, which vary based on the individual.

Figure 2

Social Cognitive Theory Concepts in This Study



Note. Based on Bandura's (1977) social cognitive theory.

SCT in Previous Studies

Previous studies have applied SCT to identify the reciprocal relationship of factors on student retention. Chiang (2022) used SCT to guide their study, which focused on international students who graduate as undergraduates in the United States. Chiang focused on the individual factor in the triad referred to within SCT and how this reciprocal relationship affected environmental factors. Additionally, Burch (2018) used SCT to determine whether participation in an innovation ecosystem had a positive influence on student retention in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics disciplines. In the current study, SCT was applied in relation to the student as an

individual and was used as a guide to assess the impact academic and social systems had on student retention.

Additional studies included Priode et al. (2020) who conducted a study using SCT to identify the most supportive and restricting factors contributing to students' ability to persist in undergraduate nursing programs. In this study, SCT was applied by relating the concept of self-efficacy, which was described as the self-ability to persist and focused on nonacademic factors that influence nursing student retention. In addition, Shelton (2012) used SCT to guide their study, which looked at students in a nontraditional associate degree nursing program. In this study, SCT was used to show the interaction of background variables, internal psychological processes, and external supports.

Other Conceptual Frameworks

Several applicable theories were identified within the literature. A recurring theory was Tinto's theory of student retention. Tinto's theory was applied by Mooring (2016) and K. Mitchell et al. (2021) to highlight themes and strategies that are beneficial in the retention of nursing students. Tinto's framework proposes that students are influenced by social and academic factors related to persistence within their programs. To enhance retention, Tinto (1993, as cited in K. Mitchell et al., 2021) stated that students must feel affiliated with both social and academic systems. According to Mooring (2016) and K. Mitchell et al. (2021), strategies that were effective in combating retention were included within the academic system, such as tutoring and mentoring, as well as the social system, such as social engagements and participation.

Literature Review

In the literature review for this study, I focused on the gap in the literature related to the nursing student experience of retention strategies and the perceived contribution to academic progress. Nursing student retention can be defined as a student returning to the enrolled institution for the next year of studies as expected within a progression plan (Leary et al., 2020). There has been considerable research conducted on nursing student retention and the application of specific strategies. In addition, much research has been conducted using quantitative and mixed-methods approaches referencing both attrition and retention rates (Brook et al., 2021; Brown et al., 2021; Glew et al., 2019). Bandura's SCT uses the concepts of behavioral, environmental, and personal factors to explain how individuals acquire new behaviors and skills (Wulfert, 2021). Behavioral factors included motivation, self-efficacy, and self-regulation in relation to the current study. However, additional concepts included role modeling, definition, and vicarious reinforcement (see Bandura, 1977). In addition, environmental factors refer to factors that contribute to behavior development (Wulfert, 2021). In this review of the literature, I discuss nursing student retention; retention strategies and their effects; academic and nonacademic contributing factors; and persistence, motivation, self-efficacy, and self-regulation as identified concepts related to the current study.

Nursing Student Retention

The retention of nursing students has gained a considerable amount of interest due to the ongoing nursing shortage. The nursing shortage was estimated in 2020 to be upwards of 5.9 million nurses worldwide (A. Mitchell & Maykut, 2021; Garside et al.,

2021). According to Everett (2020), as the world enters the postpandemic period, the nursing shortage is expected to increase. The nursing shortage is considered alarming and potentially damaging to the health of numerous populations because nursing shortages contribute to unsafe staffing ratios, medication errors, decreased patient access to hospital care, and hospital-associated infections (Garside et al., 2021; Ross, 2022). As the nursing shortage becomes greater, nursing institutions are presented with the challenge of implementing programs to increase retention without decreasing NCLEX passing rates (Cross & Rogers, 2022). The retention of nursing students is a concern that can prove costly and contribute to the supply and demand of nurses (K. Mitchell et al., 2021). To combat the nursing shortage, it is imperative that an adequate number of nurses graduate from nursing programs and gain employment within the health care system.

Retention is a topic of focus in other programs including aviation, business, and medical programs. Strategies to increase student retention in these programs mirror those suggested in nursing programs such as peer mentoring, financial incentives, and enhanced orientation (Rust & Singh, 2022). Attrition rates within nursing programs are an ongoing consideration, and although they vary, rates can reach over 50% within associate degree programs (Priode et al., 2020). This attrition rate is high compared to other programs and can be attributed to increased workload and stressors in academic and clinical environments (Burleson et al., 2023). Connelly et al. (2019) stated that undergraduate nursing programs provide students with overwhelming information to learn and apply within the classroom and clinical environments. Without implementing

retention strategies, nursing students may face increased stressors leading to burnout and, therefore, withdraw from the program.

Retention Strategies

Many retention strategies have been suggested to increase student retention within nursing programs. Retention strategies vary and focus on three perspectives: the organization, the faculty, and the student. From an organizational perspective, retention strategies include an extended orientation, the creation of bridging or remediation courses, financial aid including scholarships and stipends, and the implementation of retention programs, specialists, or counselors (Bumby, 2020; Fialkowski et al., 2023; Hawkins et al., 2022). At the organizational level, it is recommended that counselors who interact with students have adequate training and are actively involved in student support strategies. It is necessary to include a straightforward referral plan that allows both faculty and students to refer to the retention program (Hawkins et al., 2022). Such plans may be implemented based on criteria such as academic performance, attendance, or personal factors (Fialkowski et al., 2023).

In comparison, faculty-focused strategies include enhanced faculty engagement, enriched teaching approaches, organized faculty follow-up and support meetings, faculty mentoring, and supplemental instruction as needed (Bumby, 2020; Hawkins et al., 2022; Mitchell et al., 2021; Zambas et al., 2020). Faculty-focused strategies also focus on classroom and testing delivery, acknowledging the requirement of student-focused teaching approaches and clear, well-written test questions (Everett, 2020). As faculty have numerous interactions with students, it is imperative they have knowledge and

understanding regarding retention programs or strategies available within their respective organizations as well as the referral process (Zambas et al., 2020). Enhanced communication between faculty and students is crucial for creating a positive and productive learning environment; however, this allows for the creation of a trusting environment and a gateway for the implementation of strategies (Wei et al., 2021). Creating a positive and productive learning environment fosters a caring environment for students. When students perceive that faculty care regarding success and outcomes, their perceptions of the learning environment are impacted, which increases their intent to graduate (Wei et al., 2021).

Retention strategies with a student focus include peer mentoring, peer-partnered learning, the use of mobile texting, podcasts, adaptive quizzing, review sessions, enhanced orientation, academic success coaches, structured study time, and how to approach studying (Brown et al., 2021; Glew et al., 2019; Hawkins, 2022; K. Mitchell et al., 2021; Watson et al., 2020; Zambas et al., 2020). In addition, organizations should promote student-centered activities that focus on self-care, such as journaling and reflection (Connelly et al., 2019). Student self-care is included within the success criteria noted by Brown et al. (2021) to include adequate rest, nutrition, and exercise, which offer work-life balance. Additional student-centered activities include focus groups that allow for discussion and active listening. Active listening provides student support by enabling empathy, caring, discussion, problem-solving techniques, and equality (Connelly et al., 2019). The use of technology should be highlighted in reference to online learning activities, such as Quizlet and online flashcards, which may enhance study tactics

(Connelly et al., 2019). Furthermore, organizations should ensure that orientation provides an overview of the online learning environment and library resources (K. Mitchell et al., 2021). These strategies are selected and applied by organizations in a varied manner.

Student-focused strategies have additional benefits, as seen with at-risk or minority populations. For students of minority or underrepresented populations, peer groups can be initiated to enhance support and success (Everett, 2020). Through implementing student-focused strategies, retention can increase as students create informal relationships that contribute to success such as informal gatherings during lunch (K. Mitchell et al., 2021). Furthermore, strategies that include a structured meeting, review, or study can further benefit international students (K. Mitchell et al., 2021). Kane et al. (2021) found that it is essential for school counselors and teachers to understand nursing programs, including requirements and subsequent workload. This knowledge will help avoid negative perceptions of nursing programs and could enhance enrollment and retention. To enhance effectiveness, the student perspective will provide insight into preferred strategies and their application toward academic progress.

Nursing students face extensive information within the classroom and the clinical environment. Therefore, it is suggested that retention strategies and efforts are implemented early to increase retention (Everett, 2020). In addition, the early identification of students who are at-risk, including those who come from diverse backgrounds, minority populations, or first-generation college students, can assist in promoting success (Bumby, 2020; Connelly et al., 2019). Students who enroll in nursing

programs within underrepresented and minority populations have additional complex factors that contribute to their success and, therefore, require additional support and guidance (Diefenback & Klemm, 2021). The early identification of at-risk students allows for early intervention and follow-up and improves the likelihood of success.

As previously mentioned, researchers suggest extensive retention strategies, including an extended orientation period, peer and faculty mentorship programs, enhanced faculty engagement, and enriched teaching approaches; however, this information can be overwhelming as little clarity and evidence is provided (Bumby, 2020). Organizations may use literature to guide retention efforts. However, strategies suggested as beneficial vary, and organizations may be presented with barriers due to financial and personnel implications and, therefore, must blindly choose strategies to implement (Ebert et al., 2021). Although it is beneficial to access information regarding retention strategies, it can be difficult for organizations to select specific strategies for implementation without further knowledge and understanding of retention strategies and their effects on academic progress. Within any applied strategy, it is imperative to address challenges early, holistically, and collectively (Everett, 2020; Sanderson, 2020). There is a need to create a further comprehensive understanding of retention strategies and their contributions toward academic progress (K. Mitchell et al., 2021). Further research must assess the extensive range of retention efforts and identify student preference and effectiveness.

Academic and Nonacademic Factors

Nursing student retention has a variety of contributing factors. Students face various obstacles within nursing programs, such as learning diversity, adaptation to program expectations, and personal and academic factors that may affect academic progress (Brown et al., 2021; Everett, 2020). Both academic and non-academic factors contribute to student retention and progression within nursing programs. Academic factors include grade-point average (GPA), study habits, and previous degrees, while non-academic factors include age, gender, family support, and living situation (Bumby, 2020). Brown et al. (2021) found that nursing students have strengths in study skills and self-organization, which could be a foundation for retention programs. In addition, it is highlighted that studying, test-taking, and the faculty's ability to organize, teach, and assess were weaknesses contributing to attrition (Brown et al., 2021).

Admission and selection criteria for undergraduate nursing programs contribute to student retention and success. Undergraduate nursing programs have admission criteria such as proficiency in specific high school subjects, including mathematics, chemistry, and biology (Zamanzadeh et al., 2020). In addition, language skills, including writing and reading comprehension, should also be considered within program applications (Capponi & Mason Barber, 2020). If the organization conducts interviews or reference verification, additional abilities such as communication skills, teamwork, and emotional intelligence may also be assessed (Zamanzadeh et al.). Previous knowledge, including proficiency in science and math and reading skills, are strong predictors of student success within undergraduate nursing programs.

Clinical placement and opportunities are academic factors that contribute to retention. Clinical placements occur at a variety of intervals within nursing programs. Students are often placed into a clinical group with a preceptor hired by the organization to oversee the rotation. The preceptor may lack training and consistency in evaluation approaches, negatively affecting the students (Fairfield, 2022). During clinical placements, students gain an unfiltered understanding of the nursing profession, which can be negatively portrayed. Students may be led to believe that maintaining a positive work-life balance is complex, and the lack of career advancements is minimal, therefore leading to an exodus from the program (Garside et al., 2021).

Non-academic factors such as age, financial hardships, anxiety, lack of coping skills, a diagnosis of attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and a lack of study skills were found in unsuccessful students (Pence & Suerth, 2020; Vessary & Cannon, 2022). Non-academic factors also include time management, study skills, and organizational skills, which support retention, highlighting the importance of understanding student experiences (Priode et al., 2020). Hawkins et al. (2022) found that time is a significant barrier nursing students face that requires the application of life management, coping, and organizational skills to be successful. Nursing students who do not progress within their programs are subject to increased financial costs and an emotional toll (Cross & Rogers, 2022). As nursing students and healthcare organizations are both affected by student success and program progress, it is essential to understand how non-academic factors contribute to success.

Gender is a non-academic factor that can contribute to retaining those who identify as male. Male nursing students reported gender bias, limitations in the clinical environment, and the lack of male models during their nursing program (Powers et al., 2018). In addition, students who identify as a minority face various obstacles, including difficulties with school-life balance, unfamiliar territory, and stress due to course workload (Rapoza et al., 2021). These factors heighten nursing student burnout, which is a factor that contributes to retention rates within nursing programs. Students enrolled in nursing programs are at a higher risk for burnout as they experience higher levels of stress in comparison to students in other fields (Burleson et al., 2023).

The COVID-19 pandemic is a non-academic factor that affected nursing students' education and clinical experiences, thus contributing to retention. During the pandemic, nursing students faced various obstacles, including disruptions to clinical rotations, transitions to online learning, curriculum adjustments, increased workload, stressors, limited access to resources, and the impact on graduation and licensing examinations (Ulenaers et al., 2021). The transition to online learning created additional student concerns due to fewer hands-on learning opportunities like those experienced during simulation experiences. Given the inexperience of online teaching, many faculty faced a lack of preparedness for the forced pivot to online learning (Bdair, 2021). This led to inadequacies in the teaching approach utilized to engage students in necessary content.

The perceptions prospective students have of a career in nursing can contribute to retention within nursing programs. Individuals may develop perceptions based on social constructs, family enhancement, or through informal education sessions such as those led

by guidance counselors. As students gain acceptance into nursing programs, there is often a discrepancy between expectations and the reality of their studies and subsequent practice (Ten Hoeve et al., 2017). Students can lack insight regarding the overwhelming nature of nursing programs, including heavy courseload and clinical requirements. When exposed to these elements within the first year of nursing programs, many students leave the program, contributing to higher attrition rates in the first two years in comparison to later years (Collard et al., 2020). Prospective students can be motivated to enter the health care field due to altruism and a caring nature (Schuller et al., 2019). Upon entering clinical practice, students can be exposed to the harsh reality of nursing, which includes shift work, understaffing, lack of mentorship, and an overall lack of support, which can contribute to retention (Ten Hoeve et al., 2017). Preconceived perceptions and rationale for engaging in the health care field should be considered to contribute to retention and success.

Persistence and Motivation

As nursing programs include overwhelming amounts of information, persistence, and motivation are essential to ensure academic progress. Student persistence is influenced by resiliency, which is deteremined by both academic and non-academic factors. In turn, resiliency has been linked to academic performance and success (Brown et al., 2021). A typical reference in relation to academic progress is the need for students to demonstrate perseverance and persistence within nursing programs to be successful. Factors such as gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status are often associated with persistence and can assist in predicting academic progress (Priode et al., 2020). In

addition, students require a desire to learn and must demonstrate persistence and motivation to gain success (Terry et al., 2024). To allow students to foster persistence within their nursing program, students must create clear, attainable goals, demonstrate resiliency, have a positive mindset, and have practical time management skills (Brown et al., 2021).

For nursing students, motivational factors include time management, life management, study habits, and organizational skills (Priode et al., 2020). Motivating factors of a non-academic nature, such as family support, organizational skills, and study habits, contribute to the retention of nursing students (Hawkins et al., 2021). Retention strategies implemented within nursing programs can contribute to developing these traits deemed necessary for student success (Smith-Wacholz et al., 2019). Within nursing programs, it is recommended to implement a process that brings attention to students who do not meet specific criteria and are, therefore, at risk for attrition. Such programs focus on student reading assessments, test-taking ability, and overall readiness (Mitchell et al., 2021). Glew et al. (2019) found that GPA is a motivating factor as students with lower academic performance based on GPA were less motivated and engaged in their studies. Motivation can be fostered through developing personal goals, including short and long-term, ensuring a supportive environment, and seeking inspiration from others (Priode et al., 2021).

Nursing students benefit by displaying grit, a non-cognitive trait that acts as a drive to keep the individual on task in varied circumstances (Terry et al., 2024). Grit is the passion and perseverance to achieve long-term goals. Through developing and

applying this trait, nursing students can work to overcome challenges and maintain effort as well as interest despite setbacks or failures (Meyer et al., 2020). Displaying grit allows individuals to persevere in established long-term goals by implementing a variety of strategies and resources. This trait is common among nursing students and is parallel to resiliency and resourcefulness. Grit has been shown to have positive effects on success, retention, performance, and life satisfaction among medical students (Ray & Brown, 2015).

Self-Efficacy and Self-Regulation

Self-efficacy can be associated with increased motivation and refers to an individual's belief in their competence to complete tasks and achieve desired outcomes (Bandura, 1977). Elevated levels of self-efficacy can be attributed to student success, while lower levels can be linked to attrition (Terry et al., 2024). An undergraduate student who displays self-efficacy is likely to be able to cope with challenges and produce anticipated outcomes. Furthermore, when enabled, self-efficacy significantly impacts the persistence of effort for long-term goals (DeWitz et al., 2009). This belief aligns with students enrolled in undergraduate nursing programs.

The presence of self-efficacy can relate to learning motivation which can predict positive student outcomes (Ahmadi et al., 2023). Undergraduate students with high levels of self-efficacy approach coursework with a positive mindset which improves the likelihood of success. When students who display self-efficacy face a challenge, the challenge is regarded as an opportunity instead of an obstacle (Terry et al., 2024). Self-efficacious students are more likely to actively engage in the learning process through

participation and have a higher likelihood to seek out additional resources such as retention strategies or programs. Such students often build supportive relationships with peers and faculty and engage in peer-support groups that foster learning and motivation (Wan et al., 2023).

Due to the course content and workload found within undergraduate nursing programs, self-regulation is a fundamental skill for nursing students. Self-regulation refers to the ability to manage one's thoughts, emotions, and behaviors to gain success (Attia & Abdelwahid, 2020). Success is applicable to academic and clinical experiences in undergraduate nursing programs. Self-regulation is necessary for students and contributes to maintaining focus, developing resilience, and adaptability. Students who demonstrate self-regulation create disciplined study habits, set realistic goals, and excel at time management (Kurt & Eskimez, 2022). As a predictor for success, the presence of self-regulation increased learning engagement and decreased stress for undergraduate students (Tomas & Poroto, 2023). In addition, reflection is a related component of self-regulation, where students can reflect on and learn from experience by adjusting strategies to increase the likelihood of success (Attia & Abdelwahid, 2020).

While enrolled in nursing programs, students face various obstacles that contribute to student retention. There are a significant number of suggested retention strategies including an extended orientation, peer and faculty mentorship programs, enhanced faculty engagement, and enriched teaching approaches (Bumby, 2020). Student retention has been studied by researchers including Burleson et al. (2023), Collard et al. (2020), Cross and Rogers (2022), and Ebert et al. (2021), however, little is known about

student nurses' experience of retention strategies and how student nurses perceive the contributions to academic progress. I found very few studies that refer to the student experience of retention strategies and their perceived contribution to academic progress. Although it is beneficial to access information regarding retention strategies, it can be difficult for organizations to select specific strategies for implementation without further knowledge and understanding of retention strategies and their effects on academic progress. Within organizations, retention strategies are available to students, yet selection and application are optional and based on student choice and preference (Smith-Wacholz et al., 2019). Although students may be presented with various strategies, those deemed beneficial vary, and organizations may be presented with barriers to implementation such as financial and personnel implications (Ebert et al., 2021). Further research will assist in guiding student selection of retention strategies to improve program progression and success.

Summary and Conclusions

As students use retention strategies, it would be beneficial to create further understanding regarding student experiences of retention strategies and their perceived contributions toward academic progress. The literature demonstrates that nursing student retention is multi-faceted. Undergraduate nursing students are at a high risk for attrition due to program requirements and intensity and have the potential to benefit from the implementation of retention strategies (Bumby, 2020). Researchers suggest various retention strategies to mitigate attrition; however, implementation is based on student selection and preference (Bumby, 2020; Ebert et al., 2021). It is beneficial for educational

institutions to be aware of factors contributing to retention, including those of academic and non-academic realms, and the presence of motivation, persistence, self-efficacy, and self-regulation. These factors contribute to student success and, ultimately, graduation in various capacities, as previously identified.

Knowledge gained may assist organizations in implementing specific strategies to ensure program progression as it can improve understanding of the student nurses' experience and provide information regarding strategy effectiveness and utilization. Furthermore, knowledge regarding student experiences of retention strategies and their contribution to academic progress will assist organizations in the implementation of specific strategies that are more likely to contribute to student success, thus reducing financial and personnel implications. Although researchers have investigated student retention, little is known about student nurses' experience of retention strategies and how student nurses perceive the contributions to academic progress (Mitchell et al., 2021). In Chapter 3, I provide an overview of the research design, rationale, methodology, data analysis plan, and trustworthiness.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive study was to explore how nursing students experience retention strategies and their perceived contributions to academic progress. In this study, I explore participants' experience in relation to retention strategies and whether this exposure was applicable toward academic progress. Qualitative methodology was selected to allow participants to provide insight through answering open-ended questions in individual interviews. Chapter 3 presents the selected research design and rationale, role of the researcher, methodology, sampling, participant selection, data collection, data analysis plan, issues of trustworthiness, and ethical procedures.

Research Design and Rationale

The research question for this study was the following: How do nursing students experience retention strategies in relation to academic progress? The interview questions were open-ended, which allowed for the participants to provide further information and insight regarding the phenomenon of retention. According to Ebert et al. (2021), student retention rates are indicative of student success within nursing programs, which contributes to the shortage of nurses. Therefore, developing further knowledge regarding the impact of retention strategies on academic progress may be beneficial for the health care system and educational organizations. The central concepts of this study were focused on nursing students' experience with retention strategies and their perceived contribution to academic progress. In this study, focus was placed on the student lens and application of retention strategies toward achieving success. Additional concepts included motivation, persistence, self-efficacy, self-regulation, and the environment.

I conducted a qualitative descriptive study to explore students' experiences of retention strategies and the perceived contribution to academic progress. I selected a qualitative descriptive design because it aligned with the research question. Furthermore, this design allowed for the exploration and description of the concepts of retention strategies and academic progress and to create further understanding in reference to a purposefully sampled group of nursing students. A qualitative design allows for the exploration of a central phenomenon and the meaning of the phenomenon to the participants (Patton, 2015). Through the exploration of student perceptions of retention strategies and their perceived effects on academic progress, information was gathered that could assist faculty in supporting student success. A qualitative approach allowed for students to provide insight into their views and perspectives related to retention strategies and how they contribute to academic progress within nursing programs. Qualitative methodology allows the researcher to use interpretive research tools to understand groups such nursing students (see Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Through the application of fieldwork and naturalistic engagement, a qualitative researcher is exposed to the group in their natural setting. This allows for the focus to be placed on the voices and experiences as explained by the participants (Gray & Grove, 2021). In the current study, individual interviews were guided by open-ended questions that allowed participants to describe retention strategies used and explain how these strategies related to academic progress.

Role of the Researcher

In this study, my role encompassed both the participant and observer roles throughout the one-on-one interviews. During the interviews, I was an active participant

in the process while also observing participant verbal behaviors. Because I was directly interacting with each participant, it was imperative to be aware of personal biases, experiences, and values that may affect my interpretation of the data. To develop awareness of the impact that personal, educational, and work experiences can have in relation to participant interaction, data collection, and interpretation of findings, researchers can use reflexive thinking (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). During the research process, it was imperative to keep an open mind and not influence participant behaviors and responses. To ensure this process was followed, it was necessary to reflect on any plausible connections or interactions that may occur aside from the research project in relation to the research site.

During data collection, when conducting one-on-one interviews, I ensured that my individual experiences or biases were not implied. As a former nursing student and current faculty member, I ensured that there was not any judgment toward participants during their discussions and responses. Due to my professional background, it was necessary to identify potential biases based on past experiences and interactions. Reflective journaling was used to record roles and potential influences within the study (see Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Because I was not directly involved in the program that participants were recruited from, there was no power differential between the participants and me.

Methodology

Participant Selection Logic

I used purposeful sampling to recruit nursing students enrolled in the RPN program at a local educational organization. Purposeful sampling was selected because it allowed for participants to be recruited who would provide relevant and meaningful responses in relation to this study (see Patton, 2015). Students could be enrolled in either year of the 2-year program. Potential participants were recruited through an email sent by the program coordinator with the recruitment poster attached (see Appendix A). The poster was also displayed throughout the nursing department and on the program's learning management system (LMS) site. Interested students emailed me via the email address provided on the recruitment flyer. Once contact was established, I determined whether the participant met the inclusion criteria by reviewing the completed screening tool (see Appendix B).

Establishing inclusion and exclusion criteria for study participants was required to ensure high-quality research was conducted (see Patino & Ferreria, 2018). Inclusion criteria are key features of the target population. The study's inclusion criteria included students currently enrolled in the RPN program at the selected organization. Participants could be enrolled within the first or second year of the 2-year program. Participants could be of any gender. Exclusion criteria included students enrolled in other nursing programs at the organization. Furthermore, participants had to be of legal age (18 and older). Participants had to be able to provide informed consent to participate. Once consent was

obtained, participants were sent an email to schedule a one-on-one interview (see Appendix C).

In this study, the target sample size was between 12 and 20. A minimum sample size was used with purposive sampling to guide recruitment efforts while allowing flexibility if needed (see Patton, 2015). This sample size was expected to allow for the collection of an adequate amount of data and data saturation. In qualitative studies, reaching saturation can vary based on the information and data gathered; therefore, flexibility is an asset (Patton, 2015). The current research question related to the population and the organization of focus; therefore, the sample size of 12 to 20 was assumed to be sufficient (see Baker et al., 2012). In similar studies, Powers et al. (2018) used a descriptive phenomenological approach focused on the lived experience of being a male nursing student and included 11 participants. Rapoza et al. (2021) had 12 participants in their study, which addressed the lived experience of stress in Latinx nursing students. Saturation in the current study was reached when analysis of the one-on-one interview transcripts revealed no new information or themes (see Patton, 2015).

Instrumentation

A demographic questionnaire and an interview guide were developed for this study. The demographic questionnaire contained four questions (see Appendix D). The interview guide was created for use during the one-on-one interviews. It consisted of nine open-ended questions with two sub-questions to probe the participant's responses (see Appendix E). The questions were developed to align with the research question and gap found in previous research.

Researcher-Developed Instruments

I created the interview guide based on the concepts of student retention and motivation in addition to previous research and data (see Fialkowski et al., 2022; Kane et al., 2021). The questions and subquestions were created as a guide to allow for obtaining data relevant to the research question. The interview questions focused on retention strategies and their effects on academic success and challenges. The questions were open-ended, which allowed the participants to speak openly regarding the focus topic and provide their experiences and insights. When developing the interview guide, I used previous research by Kane et al. (2021) and Fialkowski et al. (2022) to assist in framing questions related to the research focus. Kane et al. used five questions to guide their descriptive qualitative study focused on the factors surrounding the recruitment and retention of men in a baccalaureate nursing program. Using five questions for guidance, I elaborated on the focus area and developed questions for the interview guide that aligned with the research question and focus.

The questions in the interview guide (see Appendix E) were reviewed for validity. To ensure content validity, I compared the interview guide and its accompanying questions to previous studies, including those by Kane et al. (2021) and K. Mitchell et al. (2021). In addition, I compared the questions to Bandura's social cognitive theory to ensure that all concepts were addressed. Using interviews in qualitative research provides the opportunity to gather individualized and contextualized data (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). An interview requires planning and preparedness to allow for successful data collection. Ravitch and Carl (2021) stated that the key characteristics of a qualitative interview are

implementing an interview that is relational, contextual, nonevaluative, person centered, and subjective. When creating an interview guide, researchers should include open-ended questions and use language that will be understood by the participant (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

Data were collected through one-on-one interviews with nursing students who were enrolled in an RPN program. Interviews are a central feature of many qualitative studies due to their ability to provide deep, rich, individualized data (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). This data collection approach allowed me to gain deeper insight into the participants' experiences and perspectives of the study topic. The participants were recruited by email and poster advertisements. Because the target sample size was not met, snowball sampling was used in which participants recruited individuals who met the selection criteria (see Patton, 2015). When initial contact with the participants was made, the inclusion criteria were reviewed to ensure that the participant met the study requirements. Participants who met the inclusion criteria were provided with a consent form, which was obtained prior to data collection. In addition, participants were offered the opportunity to ask any questions regarding the study. The consent form outlined the data collection procedure that included audio recordings, notes, and transcriptions. Once consent was obtained, participants were contacted by email to schedule a one-on-one interview via Microsoft Teams. The interview was scheduled for 60 minutes. Interviews were conducted over 30 days. During the one-on-one interviews, I initially asked the participants the prepared demographic questions and then the interview guide questions.

Participants were informed that all interviews would be audio-recorded using Microsoft Teams, with secure data storage on my personal laptop, which was password protected. The interviews were audio recorded to maintain confidentiality. On completion, participants were thanked for their willingness to participate in the interview and asked if they had any additional content to share or questions. Participants were asked whether they wished to receive a copy of the transcription to verify the accuracy of collected data. In addition, participants were asked if they wished to receive a copy of the final study. Participants were provided with my email to contact me if they had any follow-up questions.

Klykken (2022) stated that informed consent formalizes a research relationship that is founded on trust and integrity. An important criterion for consent is that the participant's decision is voluntary and based on clear information provided (Klykken, 2022). The various modes of data collection and storage raise questions regarding possible breaches of information stored online. Suggestions to avoid issues surrounding data management and storage include the use of encryption techniques that offer additional safety methods with secure data sharing and storage. Furthermore, encryption offers support to withstand cyber security attacks and breaches (Seth et al., 2022). Each participant in the current study was assigned a number to maintain confidentiality in their responses.

Data Analysis Plan

The data obtained from the interviews were analyzed to identify key themes related to student retention and academic progress. The audio recordings were manually

transcribed to allow for review. Coding is one example of analyzing qualitative data. A code is most often characterized by a word or phrase that provides a summative understanding based on the provided data (Saldana, 2021). My method of analysis was descriptive coding. Descriptive coding allows the researcher to create a categorized inventory of the data's contents (Saldana, 2021). This method of coding is applicable to qualitative studies and provides a means of coding that is beneficial to novice researchers. Ravitch and Carl (2021) stated that coding involves ways of organizing and labeling data that assist with analysis. Coding allows the researcher to organize the data in a manner that supports analysis in identifying patterns, relationships, or themes within the data. Ravitch and Carl (2021) stated that the process of qualitative research is inductive in that the researcher identifies concepts and theories from data that emerge from engagement with participants. Inductive reasoning is a cognitive process that generates new knowledge based on observations and data (Liu et al., 2019).

After the interviews were concluded, transcription was completed, and the data were entered into Word documents. After these steps were completed, each line was numbered to enable line-by-line coding (see Saldana, 2021). This approach provided a mindful transition to coding for the novice researcher. All data were included in the data analysis including any discrepant cases to create a deeper understanding of the participants' experience. In the first cycle of coding, the recordings and transcripts were reviewed, and field notes were created. The subsequent data were entered into a Word document. The data were reviewed multiple times. Data that stood out or were repetitive

were highlighted as a means of summarizing (see Saldana, 2021). When the first cycle of coding was complete, I reviewed and compared data from each source.

In the second cycle of coding, I reviewed the data to identify related codes to create categories based on shared elements, significance, or meaning (see Saldana, 2021). Using different colors, I highlighted similar codes within the data. Grouping codes with similar meanings allowed for the creation of categories (see Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Creating categories allowed me to group similar codes that had a shared meaning. This process was done to create structure within the codes (see Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Through recognizing repetitive data and creating categories, I noted saturation within the data.

After identifying categories within the data, the next step was to define themes (Saldana, 2021). Themes are a representation of concepts that stood out as important within the data (Gibson & Brown, 2009, as cited in Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Themes are developed by the researcher and do not simply emerge from the data; they are developed based on the linkage of one or more categories (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Themes will offer explanations of why something happened, or what something means (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

Issues of Trustworthiness

The trustworthiness of the research was established by using Lincoln and Guba's framework, which addresses credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Guba, 1981). Credibility refers to the extent that participants validate the findings to be true of their experiences. This was obtained by conducting interviews that are structured,

performing a systematic data analysis, and allowing for member checking and reflexivity (Patton, 2015; Ravitch & Carl, 2021). By providing participants with the opportunity to review the interview transcript after completion, member checking was implemented. As a researcher with an active role in this process, I practiced reflexivity by journaling to identify personal connections and biases.

Transferability refers to the ability of the study results to be applied to similar situations. This was accomplished by allowing students from either year of the program to participate in the study. In the development of the interview guide, resources from other specialty areas were included as student retention is comparable in various programs. In addition, detailed descriptions of the data, as well as the context, were included so that readers can make comparisons (Ravitch & Carl, 2021).

Dependability refers to the reliability of data over time, as well as alignment to the research questions, and the ability for the study to be repeated (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). In the research plan, thorough rationale and explanation were provided to ensure that the research plan, including data collection and analysis, was understood. Triangulation can be used as a strategy to support dependability, but other strategies include sequencing of methods and ensuring strong, appropriate rationale for choices related to data collection (Ravitch & Carl, 2021).

Finally, confirmability refers to the extent to which the findings are based on or influenced by the researcher and their personal biases. To achieve this, an audit trail was completed when conducting data collection and analysis. In addition, triangulation and researcher reflexivity were practiced (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). As confirmability looks to

acknowledge and explore the way biases make their way into interpretations of the data, researchers must continually challenge themselves and be challenged by others. This was accomplished through reflexivity processes and external audits (Ravitch & Carl, 2021).

Intra and inter-coder reliability will be established as I was solely responsible for coding all the data. During the coding process, each audio recording and transcript was reviewed. From this data, field notes were created. Each entry was reviewed in a consistent manner to ensure reliability. The subsequent data was entered into a Word document which was reviewed multiple times. Data that stood out or was repetitive was highlighted as a means of summarizing (Saldana, 2021). I used Word to organize codes and themes found within the data. To ensure intra and inter-coder reliability, I reviewed the data using a systematic approach (Cofie et al., 2022).

Ethical Procedures

To ensure ethical procedures are followed, I followed all ethical procedures and documentation to enhance the trustworthiness of the research results. When conducting the study, I followed Walden University's guidelines for research conducted with human participants. I received Walden IRB approval on April 26, 2024 – 04-26-24-1119920. In addition, I will adhere to all ethical procedures and policies according to the partner site. I received REB approval from the partner site to conduct this study on March 20, 2024 – SC-2024-01.

When recruiting participants, I abided by ethical considerations, including providing and collecting informed consent from all involved. Additionally, the recruitment poster was placed in the nursing department for all students to access.

Recruitment emails and uploading the recruitment flyer to LMS were conducted by the program coordinator to avoid power implications between the participants and myself. Participants must have met the inclusion criteria as set out for this study and be willing participants. Participants were required to complete informed, written consent to ensure they understood the nature and focus of the study as well as the procedures for the one-on-one interview, data collection, and data analysis. Informed consent was collected after participants were provided with an understanding of the study, including the study purpose and participant's rights and responsibilities. In addition, all questions and concerns were addressed prior to obtaining consent. Participants were informed that they could withdraw their consent at any time.

During data collection, participant rights were acknowledged. Participants were prompted at the beginning of the interview that the interview would be recorded for transcription and analysis purposes. I also shared with participants that I will assume the role of researcher and participant to enhance accountability and transparency. Participants were assigned a number to ensure confidentiality in their responses. Any identifying data was replaced with pseudonyms. All documents and collected data will be securely stored for five years unless otherwise stated by the IRB. After five years, the documents and data will be securely destroyed and disposed of.

I avoided conflict by interviewing nursing students enrolled in the RPN program, which is a different program from the Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BScN) program in which I teach. The RPN and BScN students have no overlapping courses and at no point in their education will I engage with RPN students in the classroom. Both programs have

different coordinators and professors. Participants were assured that any information they provide will remain confidential and will not be shared with any individuals. To ensure no conflicts of interest or potential bias were present, I disclosed my current employment status to all participants. To acknowledge participation, participants received a $10 Tim Horton's gift card upon completion of the interview. The gift card was emailed to the participants after the interview was completed.

Summary

A descriptive qualitative research design was selected for this study due to its ability to allow the exploration of retention strategies and academic progress. In this chapter, I provided the rationale for the research design selection as well as the selection of participants, data collection methods, and analysis plan. In addition, I outlined my role as a participant and researcher in the study. Finally, issues of trustworthiness and ethical concerns and how they will be met within my study were discussed. In Chapter 4, I will discuss the results of this study.

Chapter 4: Results

Research had been conducted with a focus on retention strategies; however, minimal research had been conducted on the effect of retention strategies such as peer tutoring and faculty mentoring in relation to academic progress. The purpose of this qualitative descriptive study was to explore how nursing students experience retention strategies and their perceived contributions to academic progress. The research question was the following: How do nursing students experience retention strategies in relation to academic progress? In Chapter 4, I present the study setting, participants' demographics, and data collection process. In addition, I describe the data analysis process, evidence of trustworthiness, and results.

Setting

Participants were recruited from the distribution of the study flyer that was posted on the cohort LMS homepage. In addition, the poster was displayed in common areas in the organization and was sent via email to current RPN students. The recruitment material included my email address so interested individuals could contact me for study participation. The prospective participants contacted me if they were interested in participating in the study. Once the participants were found to meet the study's criteria, they were required to give consent. Once consent was received, study participants were provided the option to participate using Microsoft Teams or phone. All 12 participants opted for Microsoft Teams. Each interview was conducted via Microsoft Teams using audio only. In future research, using video could enhance data collection. There were no conditions influencing data collection and the participant responses.

Demographics

At the beginning of each interview, I assigned the participant a number to identify them. All participants were provided the opportunity to opt out of the study at any time. Participants were initially asked for demographic data including their gender, age, current semester, and whether they had a previous college degree. I interviewed a total of 12 participants. Eleven of the participants identified as female, and one identified as male. Eleven of the participants were in the age range of 18 to 25, and one was in the age range of 26 to 35 (see Table 1). Six participants were in their second semester of the program, and six participants were in their fourth semester. One participant had a previous college degree.

Table 1

Participant Age Range

Age range	Number of participants
18 to 25	11
26 to 35	1
36 to 45	0
45 to 55	0
56 to 65	0
66 to 75	0
> 75	0

Data Collection

After receiving IRB approval the recruitment flyer was distributed via email, posted to the cohort's LMS, and displayed in common areas at the organization. The flyer contained information the prospective student needed to contact me. Each prospective participant who emailed their interest was asked four questions as part of a screening

questionnaire to determine whether they met the selection criteria. These questions included what type of nursing program the participant was enrolled in, whether they were over the age of 18, what semester of classes they were in, and whether they had me as an instructor during their education. A total of 13 prospective participants replied to the recruitment poster, and 12 met the criteria for the study. If a prospective participant did not meet the criteria, they were thanked for their interest and informed that they did not meet the criteria to participate in the study. If a participant met the criteria, I emailed them a consent form outlining the study. Each participant who met the study criteria was asked to reply "I consent" to indicate that they agreed to the terms of the study. All 12 participants agreed to the terms of the study. Upon receiving a completed consent form, I asked participants their preference for Microsoft Teams or phone for a 60-minute interview and assessed their availability to meet. Once the interview was scheduled, I sent the participant an email confirmation of the scheduled interview within the provided date and time.

At the beginning of the interview, I assigned each participant a number that was used for the recording, transcription, and analysis to maintain confidentiality. All 12 participants opted to engage in the interview using Microsoft Teams. During the interviews, participants were asked about their preference to turn on their cameras to allow further data collection. All 12 participants stated they wished to keep their cameras off due to personal preference and comfort. My camera remained off for the duration of the interview. After asking the participants about their visual preferences, I introduced myself and reviewed the purpose of the study as outlined in the consent form. I thanked

each participant for participating and asked whether they had any questions before beginning. I reminded each participant that the study was voluntary, and they could withdraw at any time without repercussion. During the interview, participants were first asked four demographic questions (see Appendix D) and open-ended questions from the interview guide (see Appendix E).

Location, Frequency, and Duration of Data Collection

Each participant was invited to participate in a one-on-one interview to take place via Microsoft Teams or phone. All 12 participants chose to complete the interview via Microsoft Teams. During the interview, all 12 participants opted to keep their cameras turned off, so the interview was audio-recorded only. At the time of the scheduled interview, participants were asked if they were in a private location and able to complete the interview at this time. I conducted the interviews from my home office. I met the participants in the Microsoft Teams meeting for each scheduled time. Participants joined the meeting using the provided calendar and email invitation. Each interview was scheduled for 60 minutes. The average time of completion was 25 minutes, ranging from 17 to 41 minutes (see Table 2). After the interview, participants were provided with a copy of the transcript to review. At the end of the interview, each participant was asked whether they had any additional information to share or whether they had any questions. Once any additional information was shared, the interview concluded, and participants were thanked for their participation. All participants received a 10-dollar Tim Horton's gift card for participation. The gift card was sent to their email, which was confirmed with the participant during the interview.

Table 2

Interview Length by Participant

Participant	Length of interview
1	31:00
2	21:20
3	26:30
4	32:10
5	33:15
6	29:30
7	27:30
8	22:00
9	41:01
10	17:59
11	18:20
12	19:00

Recording of Data

Each interview was audio recorded using Microsoft Teams. The audio recording was saved to my personal computer, which was password protected. At the beginning of the interview, each participant was assigned a number to identify the participant and ensure confidentiality. The participant number was included in the audio recording, transcription, and field notes. I transcribed each interview verbatim in a Word document. A copy of the transcript was sent to each participant to review and ensure accuracy. In addition, I made field notes during and after the interview. After each interview, I made an entry in a reflective research journal.

Variations in Data Collection

Initially, I used purposeful sampling to recruit students enrolled in an RPN program. Purposeful sampling was selected because it allowed for participants to be recruited who would provide relevant and meaningful responses in relation to this study

(see Patton, 2015). The recruitment flyer was distributed via email, posted to the cohort's LMS, and displayed in common areas at the organization. Initially, I received multiple inquiries from prospective participants. After a few interviews were completed, snowball sampling was conducted to recruit additional nurses who met the selection criteria. This strategy allowed me to complete 12 interviews in a period of 4 weeks.

Unusual Circumstances

No unusual circumstances were encountered during the interviews. Before the interview with Participant 2, the participant indicated via email that they would be late arriving home and provided a time that they would be available. The participant was offered a later date and time; however, they stated that the same date with a later time was fine. The interview was conducted on the planned day at the time the participant provided.

Data Analysis

I started the data analysis process by completing a verbatim transcription of each interview recording. Each interview was transcribed manually into a Word document, which allowed for immersion in the data. Following transcription, descriptive coding was used as a first-cycle method of coding to create a categorized inventory of the data (see Saldana, 2021). This method of coding applies to qualitative studies and provides a means of coding that is beneficial to novice researchers. After each transcription was entered into a Word document, each line was numbered to enable line-by-line coding (see Saldana, 2021). I reviewed the data from each interview and created field notes to track any recurring or significant data. After reviewing the data multiple times, I highlighted

data that stood out as repetitive. This process allowed me to identify codes within the data.

In the second cycle of coding, I reviewed the data and the codes to identify similar or related codes. I did this by using different colors to highlight codes that were similar or related. This process was completed using Microsoft Word, and field notes were kept on paper for reference. This process was completed for each interview. This allowed me to sort the data in a manner that was easy to review. Codes were grouped according to their relevant meaning. For example, the codes of self-care, sleep habits, coping strategies, and stress were grouped because they were similar. After similar codes were grouped, categories were created. The creation of categories was completed by grouping codes with shared elements, significance, or meaning (see Saldana, 2021). The codes of self-care, sleep habits, coping strategies, and stress were grouped as they were similar, which led to the creation of the category of well-being. Additional categories included student support services, student engagement, classroom techniques, study tools, study strategies, and social activities. The second cycle of coding led to the creation of seven categories, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3

Codes and Categories

Code	Category
Self-care, sleep habits, coping strategies, stress	Well-being
Support services, testing center, learning accommodations, clinical learning plans	Student support services
Communication, faculty support, faculty approachability, class sizes, workload	Student engagement
Learning styles, teaching approaches, testing methods, remediation	Classroom techniques
Cue cards, memorization, Elsevier adaptive quizzing (EAQ)	Study tools
Peer support, peer tutoring, group work, writing support, family support, study groups	Study strategies
Student council, student-led events, college-themed events	Social activities

After identifying categories within the data, I conducted the third cycle of coding to define themes (see Saldana, 2021). I noted that saturation was met, and three prominent themes emerged after data analysis: finding balance in personal life and academia, visualization of success, and a sense of belonging (see Table 4). Visualization of success was referenced in many of the interviews. For example, Participant 4 stated "interacting with faculty and creating a plan for the semester allows me to visualize

success." Similarly, Participant 6 stated "the support provided by our professors makes me feel like I will be successful." In reference to the theme of finding balance in personal life and academia, students discussed the value of ensuring a healthy mindset whereas Participant 5 stated "by making sure I get enough sleep and study breaks, I do better on my tests by remembering important information." Participant 7 stated "the student support office can help with accommodations for tests and in-class assignments. They help me feel ready and make me want to do well." Finally, a sense of belonging was identified by Participant 1 who stated "we work together in study groups and can help each other if someone doesn't understand a question or assignment." Participant 7 stated "the student union puts on social events like pubs or bingo which help me to feel engaged but also take my mind off of school." There were no discrepant cases found during data analysis.

Table 4

Codes, Categories, and Themes

Code	Category	Theme
Self-care, sleep habits, coping strategies, stress	Well-being	Finding balance in personal life and academia
Student support office, testing center, learning accommodations, clinical learning plans	Student support services	
Communication, faculty support, faculty approachability, class sizes, workload	Student engagement	Visualization of success
Learning styles, teaching approaches, testing methods, remediation	Classroom techniques	
Cue cards, memorization, Elsevier adaptive quizzing (EAQ)	Study tools	
Peer support, peer tutoring, group work, writing support, family support, study groups	Study strategies	Sense of belonging
Student council, student-led events, college-themed events	Social activities	

Evidence of Trustworthiness

The research's trustworthiness was established by using Lincoln and Guba's framework to address credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Guba, 1981).

Credibility

Credibility refers to the extent that participants validate the findings to be true of their experiences. Credibility was achieved by conducting structured interviews, performing systematic data analysis, researcher reflexivity, and allowing for member checking. During the interviews, a question guide was used that included open-ended questions and sub-questions. If required, follow-up or clarifying questions were asked to ensure that detailed information was gathered. Thematic analysis was employed when conducting data analysis using three steps of coding (Saldana, 2021). Throughout the interviews, I kept a reflective journal that included my thoughts and reflections after each interview. This provided an opportunity to identify any potential bias or areas of improvement to enhance data collection during the interview process. No apparent biases were noted during the interviews or data analysis. By the twelfth interview, it was noted that no new data or themes were forthcoming, and saturation had been met.

After the interview and when verbatim transcription was completed, each participant was emailed a copy of their transcript for review. The participant was asked to review the transcript for accuracy and to indicate if any modifications were required. Four participants responded to approve of the transcript, and no response was received from the remaining eight. It was assumed that the participants approved of the transcript

and that no modifications were required, as they did not reply within the two-week timeframe as indicated in the email (See Appendix F).

Transferability

Transferability refers to the ability of the study results to be applied to similar situations. Transferability was achieved by recruiting students from either year of the RPN program to participate in the study. Students who participated were in semester two or four of the four-semester program which allowed for variability in the participants following the recruitment plan (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). The interview guide, which was developed and used for each interview, was created using resources from nursing and other specialty areas. This allows for the comparison between student retention and retention strategies in various programs. Finally, detailed data descriptions and context descriptions were noted in the footnotes and the reflective journal.

Dependability

Dependability refers to the reliability of data over time, alignment with the research questions, and the ability for the study to be repeated (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). To ensure dependability was achieved, the same interview guide was used for each interview, which provided consistency. In addition, detailed notes and documentation were kept throughout data collection and analysis. I provided a detailed description of the study's research design, recruitment process, and data analysis, allowing for replication. I also discussed the alignment of the research design to the research question previously.

Confirmability

Confirmability refers to the extent to which research findings are based on or influenced by the researcher and their personal biases. To achieve confirmability, a reflexive journal was kept during data collection and analysis to allow for documentation of any personal bias or assumptions (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). As a researcher, I ensured that I remained neutral during data analysis. Although I have experience as a nursing student and faculty, no bias or influences were noted.

Results

After data collection, descriptive coding and thematic analysis were completed using three steps of coding as outlined previously (Saldana, 2021). The data analysis resulted in the creation of three themes: finding balance in personal life and academia, visualization of success, and a sense of belonging.

Theme 1: Finding Balance in Personal Life and Academia

During the interviews, many participants discussed the need to find balance to be successful in their studies. Specifically, participants referenced the importance of balancing their personal life and studies. This was identified by many as a multi-faceted challenge. However, balance promoted participants' mental health, well-being, and academic success when achieved. Balance was sought by all, but each participant had a variety of strategies that were used. Participant 6 described their strategies as follows:

> I try to find a balance between everything that is going on. I spend a lot of time studying, but I also see my friends still and I go to yoga sometimes. I try to get to the gym as much as I can, but it's not as much as I used to go. Sometimes I forget

> to eat lunch if we are busy with classes cuz the schedule is crammed, but I have snacks with me always just in case. I make sure to eat supper, my mom usually cooks for me. And I always try to go to bed early, but sometimes I just want to watch tv and chill.

Participant 4 used different strategies as follows:

> I try to make sure I pay attention in class so I don't miss anything cuz there is so much. I make sure that I get enough sleep and take study breaks too, I do better on my tests by remembering important information when I can breaks. I was given some information to cope, like strategies, deep breathing, taking a break, walking away.

Participant 2 referred to the importance of mental health and balance stating "teachers say, mental health matters. But then, they're throwing all these readings at us, kids get really stressed out. So you know, we should find a balance between that." In comparison, Participant 3 stated "managing the expectations of home life as a student can be challenging." Finally, Participant 1 stated a challenge students faced was "balancing school and work."

The interviews highlighted the importance of balance for students and the notion that it ultimately contributes to academic progress. The provided examples alluded to the importance of balance and strategies. Four subthemes were identified regarding finding balance in personal life and academia. These subthemes, self-care, coping strategies, student support office, and learning accommodations, will be discussed further.

Self-Care

All the participants referred to self-care strategies used to mitigate challenges experienced in their program. The strategies focused on physical health, mental health, and social relationships. Physical health was a strategy mentioned by Participants 6, 8, 10, and 12. Participants 6 and 10 stated they would endeavor to go to the gym. Participant 10 stated "I try to get to the gym still, it is hard due to the workload, but it helps me focus better when I go." Participants 6 and 8 identified the importance of nutrition. Participant 8 stated "I try to eat good, it is hard, there is a lot of junk food that is faster to make and tastes better, but we know that nutrition is important, so I try." When asked about nutrition, Participant 8 stated "this means drinking water, eating fruits and vegetables, less junk food and candy." In discussing physical health, Participant 12 stated:

> I try to walk as much as I can. I walk to school when the weather is nice. Sometimes I can just listen to music and enjoy the weather. It lets me relax and feel better. I know that physical health is going to be important as nurses are on their feet so much so I think by walking and exercising if I have time I will be ready to work when I am done school.

In addition, many participants identified the need to ensure they are getting enough sleep. Participant 2 stated "I make sure that I get enough sleep and take study breaks too, I do better on my tests by remembering important information when I can breaks." As well, Participant 6 and 11 identified the need to go to bed early. Participant 11 stated "I go to bed early, I know I have to rest, sometimes it is hard cuz I will be scrolling on my phone looking at Instagram or TikTok."

Two participants identified that they attend yoga, or pilates which reference both physical and mental health. Participant 6 stated “I go to yoga sometimes” and Participant 9 stated “I go to pilates, it is reformer pilates so more like a workout but it helps me to recharge and refocus.” Participant 4 identified the importance of taking a break by stating “I just walk away.” When asked about this further, Participant 4 stated:

> It can be a lot, the number of readings, writing, tests, assignments, clinical, and even with things in place I can get overwhelmed, sometimes I just walk away cuz I feel stuck. I walk away and I come back to it with a clear mind and I feel better.

During the interviews, participants referred to the importance of social relationships with either family or friends. A majority of the participants referenced relationships with friends referring to outings such as lunches, dinners, or just spending time together. The value of these relationships appeared strong, and I felt that social relationships were important to the participants and contributed to their success. Participant 6 stated “I spend a lot of time studying, but I also see my friends” and Participant 8 stated “I made friends in my class and we study together but we hang out too, and that helps me a lot. It makes me feel better.” Participant 2 stated:

> I think that’s like really, really like plays a big part and studying and doing better in your classes because you might not understand something and someone like your friend can and they can better explain it or like studying together. You can correct each other. You can give each other information and I think like that really helps when it comes to studying and doing better in school. That it’s like you’re not studying alone. You have a support system with you, so even if you wanna

> take a break or like just like have a breather, you got like your friends with you. So yeah.

Participants mentioned that support and involvement from family can be beneficial as well. Participant 9 stated "my family will ask me how it's going and what I am doing in class this week. It is nice they want to know and I like sharing some of the examples with them. They are proud of me." Similarly, Participant 5 stated their family was active in their learning. In reference to studying for tests, Participant 5 stated "I have my family ask me questions too." Although family support is beneficial, some participants identified this as challenging. Participant 4 stated "managing the expectations of home life as a student can be challenging." When asked about what home life as a student meant, Participant 4 stated:

> There is a lot going on. I have school so lots of classes, studying for tests, writing papers, but I also have to help at home. I live with my parents and they are great, but I have to help with chores like making my bed and laundry. I help during the winter if there is a lot of snow. I work too so I have my own money and I don't have to ask my parents for money all the time.

Coping Strategies

Participants identified a variety of coping skills during the interviews including some previously discussed such as taking breaks, and physical activity. Participants mentioned additional coping skills such as deep breathing, creating a schedule, time management, and counseling. Participant 5 mentioned the acquisition of skills that were gained from a friend using local counseling services, they stated:

> I know one of my friends had to use it cuz she was freaking out when we first started and was crying lots, they helped her to calm down and gave her some information to cope, like strategies, deep breathing, taking a break, maybe finding a hobby. She shared this stuff with me and I use some of it. Deep breathing is good if I get worked up about due dates or a test. I can usually calm myself down this way.

In addition, Participants 4, 6, 8 and 10 felt that time management was essential in contributing to their success. Participant 4 stated "having skills like time management, and prioritization, all help with success as well" and Participant 6 mentioned time management and workload when stating:

> I create lists to see what needs to get done so I can use my time effectively. There is a lot to do and if you fall behind, it would be hard to get back ahead. I try to use my schedule and to-do lists to make sure I get stuff done on time.

Participant 8 stated:

> I have talked to the counsellors at the college cuz I get worried, maybe anxious and they help with me things I can do to make sure I don't like cry or just shut down. They gave me ideas like deep breathing, or making lists of work that needs to be done.

When asked to elaborate upon about making lists, Participant 8 stated:

> I will make lists of everything, assignments, tests, readings, papers. I put this on a calendar so I can see what is when but I make lists too. And when something is

> done, I can cross it off and it feels good to cross it out, like, almost like one step closer to being done. One step closer to being a nurse.

In comparison, Participant 10 references both time management and prioritization as coping skills by stating "as nurses we need time management and prioritization to take care of patients. We learn about these skills in class and lab, so I use them to help me cope with all of our work."

Student Support Office

Each participant referenced the student support office during their interview. Some participants were aware of this resource from advertisements or classroom discussions, whilst others knew about it from personal experience. Participant 1 spoke of her personal experience with using the student support office by stating "yeah, I've used Suzanne, she helps me come up with, like, ways to study and like a study schedule." Participant 1 also addressed the provision of counseling within the organization by stating "yeah. I think there's like therapy at the school or something" and Participant 7 discussed their personal experience by stating:

> I was having a hard time adjusting when I first started. I was a high school graduate and I didn't feel ready. I met with a counselor, and she helped me get organized. She gave me almost like an orientation to college life. She told me about resources and stuff no one else did. I saw her a few times in her office and she has emailed me since to ask me how everything was going.

Many participants stated that the student support office offered assistance with studying and test-taking. Participant 5 stated "I use some of the college supports like the testing

centre or student supports. They give some study plans and can help you set up a test-taking plan if you need it." Similarly, Participant 7 stated:

> I was having trouble studying and I went to the support office. They gave me stuff to look at that went over different ways to study. They told me that not all people can study the same way so it was good to have different ways to study. This helped me a lot.

When asked about resources, Participant 4 referred to those available at the organization. Participant 4 stated:

> They help students, especially student success, they are there to make sure we pass and graduate. They will help us with whatever if needed. I think they can even get you a computer if you need one, and we do need one in this program. language barriers or like our international.

Participants 8 and 10 mentioned during their interviews that it would be beneficial to know about these services earlier on in the program. Participant 8 stated "I found out about the student supports from a friend in my class. I had no idea about them. They should tell us that during orientation" and Participant 10 suggested that "knowing about all the things they offer earlier in the program could be helpful, they should share this earlier with the students."

Learning Accommodations

The interviews provided insight into a variety of learning accommodations that students used during the semester which contributed to their success. Examples of learning accommodations include a note-taker, a recording device, extra time for tests

and assignments, and out-of-class testing. The note-taker was mentioned by Participants 1 and 3. Both participants mentioned that the organization previously had a note-taker, although this resource was not available during the past school year. Participant 1 stated:

> Oh yeah, they used to have a note-taker. They don't have that anymore. I guess I think it was like a student in the class that was paid to take the notes and then they shared their notes with whoever was in the student success room, and then they'd send it to whoever needed them, like whoever was signed up for that with extra help, but we didn't have one this year.

Similarly, Participant 3 stated:

> Even the note-taker, that was, that was another great one. There was one available. I don't know for who. I don't know which condition that student had, but the supports appeared for like a month or so on and then there was no more note-taker

Two participants mentioned recording devices during their interview. Participant 1 stated, "and they gave me a pen that records the lectures while I'm writing notes. But I didn't use it yet." In comparison, Participant 3 stated:

> You know, as an international students, we still have to, like, read, we read things two or three times, and we assess the means of the student support to see if I can record my classes. It should be available as with the language barrier. That's the most important thing for you to understand is that class. But they say no, you cannot record the class. That's not possible. You can only record the class if your

> professor allows you, but even with that you have to submit that form to the student's support, and they say that they will not approve it.

Extra time on tests and assignments were discussed by many participants, and most felt this was beneficial. In reference to using resources provided by student success, Participant 1 stated "yeah, I have. That's extra time on tests" and Participant 5 stated:

> I use some of the college supports like the testing centre or student supports. They give some study plans and can help you set up a test taking plan if you need it. They can help you get extra time on tests and assignments too but I haven't used this yet. It is nice to know that I could get extra time on tests if I needed to. Helps me feel like I have that support even if I don't use it.

Participant 3 was the only student who felt that extra time on tests was not an advantage. They stated "I don't know why, because if they allow you to take more time on the test and I think that's not good cause the more time you have on a test, the more chances you have to bail on it."

Participants 7 and 10 mentioned having extra time to complete assignments. Participant 10 stated "I use the extra time on the assignments only if I need to, like, if there is too much going on at once, or I wasn't able to finish." Participant 7 stated "I have the extra time I can use on assignments; the counsellor sends that to my teacher. I haven't had to use it yet though."

A final accommodation mentioned by students was out-of-class testing. Participant 7 stated:

> I can do my tests in the testing centre, I don't have to do it with the class. This helps me to not be concerned with what everyone else is doing and to be distracted by noises like coughing, or when someone gets up cuz they are done.

Similarly, Participant 1 stated:

> Student success will like help you with like because I have ADHD. So, like, sometimes it's harder for me to learn in the classroom and everything, or like testing if someone leaves the room and I'm still writing the test. I'm just like always. Like, how are you done already? Type of thing so like offering how I can write in another room so I don't get distracted like that.

Theme 2: Visualization of Success

Many participants spoke of success as an outcome that leads to graduation. Participants stated they were motivated or encouraged by various elements throughout their education. During the interviews, each participant referred to faculty as a major contributing factor stating their support, approachability, and availability were determining factors in their success. Participant 2 stated:

> Yes, I think like it's always like I think like the professors are really helpful too. Like they would give you like resources which I like. I was really grateful for. I think support systems are like good teachers provide support when it's needed and there's like many opportunities to seek out for like help.

Participants also referred to interactions with faculty and their ability to provide motivation. Participant 9 stated "by talking with the teacher, I felt like I would be successful, like they wanted me to pass. They were there to teach us."

Participants spoke of either success, progress, or graduation during the interviews. Many participants referred to their future careers as nurses and how the knowledge and skills gained within the program would contribute to that. Participant 11 stated “we practice and we read and get tested. There is a lot to learn, but we need to know all of this when we start working.” These varied components contribute to the visualization of success, whereas participants see themselves as contributing members of the healthcare profession. Each participant discussed the importance of visualization and the goal of success. Three subthemes were identified throughout the data analysis. These subthemes are faculty support, approachability and availability, teaching approaches and study tools, and workload.

Faculty Support, Approachability, and Availability

During the interviews, all participants discussed faculty interactions as a major factor in program progress. Most participants, except for Participant 8, alluded to positive interactions with faculty. However, nine participants stated that interactions vary by faculty whereas Participant 4 stated:

> Not all professors have the same approach to teaching and student communication so I had a time when I asked a professor to meet or to provide additional information and they were a bit short with the response. The lack of response and support made me feel like I wasn’t supported.

Similarly, Participant 11 stated “also, professors all are different, some are approachable, some aren’t” and Participant 5 said:

> When you talk to teachers you can tell that they want you to be successful and graduate too. They are helpful most of the time. Some teachers will have office hours and make sure these work out with our schedule but not all teachers do this.

Participant 3 mentioned that faculty treat all students as equal, and stated "I know their job is to be impartial with everyone." When asked if the ability to be successful varied based on faculty approachability, Participant 3 stated "oh yeah, definitely." Participant 8 referred to a specific negative interaction when they stated "I feel like sometimes they don't care, they want to fail us, they don't want us to finish and be nurses." When asked about this statement and whether it applied to all faculty, Participant 8 stated "no, just some, I guess."

Participants referred to faculty as being approachable and available. Availability referred to the ability to answer questions during or after class, or the ease that participants were able to set up a meeting during office hours. Faculty office hours did vary, however, participants noted that many faculty worked to accommodate their class schedules to ensure they could provide time to meet. Participants felt that faculty support was directly related to their success. Participant 6 stated "like good teachers provide support when it's needed and there's like many opportunities to seek out for like help." In addition, Participant 2 stated "yes, I think like it's always like I think like the professors are really helpful too. Like they would give you like resources which I like. I was really grateful for." When questioned regarding how retention strategies contribute to academic progress, Participant 9 stated "support from professors is a contributing factor – the way

they offer help or have availability, the way they communicate to us. Like their forms of communication."

Faculty interactions were also discussed by many participants in reference to clinical instructors and placements. Participants stated that clinical instructors can be part-time or full-time faculty. It was mentioned during the interviews that clinical commences in the first semester. In contrast, Participant 7 stated "clinical is okay, it is hard to start right away but I get why we do that." During the interviews, participants referred to their clinical instructors as supportive and approachable thus contributing to their success. Participant 1 recounted a negative experience stating:

> Uh, yeah, I can talk about clinical because they failed me in clinical for rolling my eyes, but no one ever told me at the time. Never pulled me aside when I supposedly did that and said anything. I didn't get a learning plan or anything, it just came up on final evaluation and that was like it.

When asked about the learning plan, Participant 1 stated:

> It was like what needed, what I've like, what needs to be worked on. And then it was ways to improve that underneath or something like that. And like we would like touch base every clinical and she would say like yeah, you're doing better or like here's where we can improve or like I would reach out and say here's ways I could improve because I had to like fix up my care plans and stuff.

Participant 6 recalled a positive experience in clinical stating:

> Maybe in clinical I have had some things that were hard, but I just told my instructor and she helped me to look over the instructions or like the policy for the

> skill or whatever it was. She told me what to do and said she would come with me. And like that support was good, it helped me.

Finally, Participant 11 mentioned that clinical instructors could benefit from additional support and orientation stating "we are unfamiliar with the unit or area and do not get an experienced instructor who is aware of the unit – I think the orientation for them can be better."

Teaching Approaches and Study Tools

Many participants spoke about individual learning styles and subsequent teaching approaches during the interviews. Participants 1 and 4 spoke of teachers using PowerPoints. Participant 1 stated "yeah, some of the ways they teach, like, some of them will just post this slide show and say here you go, other ones will go into detail and teach it" and Participant 4 stated "also, I think that like the way some teachers use in class is a bit hard, it can be boring when they just read the slides the whole time. I can get distracted and I miss something they said." In addition, Participant 5 stated "professors all have different approaches to learning and teaching which can be difficult as well for some of us."

Participants noted that the best teaching method was a variety of approaches, which contributed to knowledge retention and, ultimately, academic progress. When asked about in-class experiences, Participant 2 stated:

> Um, so I'm more of like a visual learner. So whatever like we would learn in class instead of going through the textbooks, going through the readings, I'll find my own resources like I'll find like YouTube videos because I can visually learn and

> I'll jot notes like points that I learned from the YouTube videos and I will compare it to my lectures and then I'll just skim through like textbooks to see like if it relates and there's like new points I can like relate to a point I found through the video and like those like honestly that has helped me like overcome like most of my challenges and like how has helped me prepare for like my classes and my tests especially for pharmacology.

Furthermore. Participant 7 stated "I just feel like when it comes to, like teaching, teachers should add more like resources like videos and stuff instead of like just throwing readings on us" and Participant 2 stated "so whatever like we would learn in class instead of going through the textbooks, going through the readings, I'll find my own resources like I'll find like YouTube videos."

Multiple participants referred to the timing of PowerPoint being uploaded to the Learning Management Software (LMS) as a contributing factor to class preparation and success. Participant 1 stated "yeah, prewriting my notes before class. If they post the slideshows before class. And then going to class and listening to what I already have written down, because sometimes they just read off the slides." Likewise, Participant 3 mentioned it is appreciated when PowerPoints are posted ahead of time, stating:

> Well, when you have the notes on the slides and physical and the electronic books or apps, you can like recap the specific material they give you on class and reread everything again and at least from the from some classes the this is life.
>
> With my notes, there were not 100% I really recommend this students to print the the material or if they wanna take notes on paper that's fine as long as they keep

> focusing on that only because electronic devices can be thoughtful, we are doing everything you know the iPad can sort the books and everything, but the classics are always better.

Testing methods were discussed by three participants who mentioned the importance of testing variations as well as being provided with test outlines. Participant 8 stated “some classes are hard cuz the tests are all multiple choice. There is nothing else, no short answer, no papers, just tests with multiple choice. That can be hard.” In addition, Participants 2 and 6 highlighted the importance of faculty providing test outlines whereas Participant 2 stated “yeah. Yeah, or even how many questions are going to be on each part” and Participant 6 stated “because sometimes they’ll say ohh it’s gonna be on this. And then whatever you study, not even on the test at all, like maybe 2 questions.”

Finally, study tools were mentioned by participants and included a variety of means such as flashcards, reviewing notes, and Elsevier Adaptive Quizzing (EAQ). Participants referred to the necessary memorization and application of content to be successful in their program. Participant 2 stated “it’s like a memorization class. And if you’re like doing flashcards, it’ll help you memorize, which I think helped me for patho.” In addition, Participant 10 stated “I rewrite my notes to study, I think this helps with memorization.” Elsevier Adaptive Quizzing was mentioned by Participants 3, 7, and 11 as a tool participants use to review content and practice answering test-style questions. Participant 11 stated “I use EAQ, they asked us to buy it to prep for the NCLEX but I think it is good, it makes the questions random so it helps to review a lot of stuff we have learned.”

Workload

Participants referred to the program workload as heavy. Participant 3 identified workload as a barrier, stating:

> The second one is the heavy workload they give you and then rush with everything afterwards. Okay, when they give you an assignment, even though you have many, many other things to do, you still have to bring it on the assignment with the proper outlines. They gave you and they don't, you know, for someone and for other ones, maybe nothing.

When asked regarding workload and the rush they referred to, Participant 3 stated "everything is due around the same time, like back to back to back, so you are rushing to finish." Similarly, Participant 7 stated "I think one of the biggest challenges is the workload such as readings, assignments, quizzes, and tests. This would include managing all of these in different courses with different professors." Readings and workload were also mentioned by Participant 9 who stated "so I was just gonna say like they expect you to, like, read all that. And like sometimes, like it's abnormally a lot of readings."

Theme 3: Sense of Belonging

During the interviews, participants referred to their interactions with colleagues, faculty, and family as contributing to academic progress. Participants alluded to the idea that they felt that working alongside their colleagues or co-students provided a sense of cohesion. The cohesion allowed students to feel supported and part of a team environment. Participant 6 stated:

> I have friends in the class too and we work together. We compare notes and we will study together. We also schedule breaks like yoga or dinner just to take our minds off all the stuff we have to do.

In addition, participants spoke about the organizational orientation and activities. Participant 8 stated:

> They had lots of activities at orientation, and then they have stuff during the year like student yoga or pubs and that helps a lot cuz it decreases the amount of stuff we have to worry about and you can talk with other students to compare what they are going through too. Like supporting each other.

During the interviews, participants referred to friends, family, and social support in various ways. These contributing factors provide students with a sense of belonging within their cohort and organization. This newfound sense of belonging contributes to student success and academic progress. Two subthemes were identified within the data. These subthemes are peer support, tutoring, organization, and student-led events.

Peer Support and Tutoring

Participants spoke highly of the benefits of peer support, such as study groups. As previously mentioned, Participant 6 spoke of peer support to "compare notes and study together." Participant 12 also referenced peer support stating "I set up study groups with my peers and that allows for some accountability with studying or completing assignments as well." Finally, Participant 2 stated "there is peer tutoring. I think this is not really like an educational setting, but like group studies, like studying with your

friends." Participants felt these approaches to studying were effective in contributing to their success in courses.

In comparison, many participants referred to peer tutoring that is available through the organization, but all participants felt reluctant to use this support. Participant 1 mentioned:

> There is like peer tutoring, help for math. And now I don't know how many people go because I think it is taught by students. Uh, for me, that would be a barrier. I think it's a little bit more, you know, embarrassing. Like I'm going to my students in my class and they're gonna try and keep, you know what I mean?

Similarly, Participant 5 stated "there is peer tutoring for writing and math, but I have never used them and they are run by students I think." When peer tutoring was mentioned by participants, it was evident that there was a lack of clarity or understanding regarding these supports.

Additional supports mentioned during interviews included study groups and financial support which Participant 4 thought were specific to international students when they stated "I think there is additional supports for international students like study groups, financial supports such as scholarships or OSAP if needed." Writing support or tutoring was mentioned by Participants 4, 7, and 9. Participant 4 stated "you can go to the writing center. They can help look over an assignment or post and they fix the formatting and grammar." In comparison, Participants 7 and 9 referred to writing support as one where you can submit your assignment for review. Participant 7 stated "you email your

assignment or post or whatever you want checked to the write place and they will make corrections or suggest stuff and send it back."

Organization and Student-Led Events

Participants referred to the benefits of attending organization-led events such as orientation or career services. Orientation was mentioned by several participants, including Participant 7, who stated "orientation helped show us what the college looked like and what was available to us, this was good as a new student," and Participant 12, who mentioned "they had lots of activities at orientation." In addition, Participant 8 referenced ongoing organization-led activities:

> They have stuff during the year like student yoga or pubs and that helps a lot cuz it decreases the amount of stuff we have to worry about and you can talk with other students to compare what they are going through too. Like supporting each other.

Although many participants recognized orientation as beneficial, Participant 4 and Participant 5 recognized an area for improvement. Participant 4 stated:

> I think supports that the college have in place are good. I think there may be an area to improve in regards to orientation, like, we start at the college and have a one-day orientation but maybe this could be a bit more.

Similarly, Participant 5 stated:

> I don't know what else they could give us. I think they have a lot of stuff ready for us to use. Maybe telling us about it earlier could be good, like instead of finding out about it when you are doing bad or having some problems. Maybe

> giving us like a list of supports or an overview in the first class or orientation would be good. It would be nice to meet some of the people who work there too, I was nervous the first time I went there for study help but they were all really nice and I wasn't scared anymore when I met them.

In addition to orientation, two participants referenced career services. Participant 2 referenced career services when asked about additional organizational support when stating "like what's it called? They can like help you with their resumes. Help you with like agency stuff." Participant 8 stated the value of these supports when they mentioned:

> When you're almost done you can go to the career center. They have postings. They will help you make a resume and a cover letter if you don't have one. They will even show you what jobs you can get based on your education.

Finally, three participants referenced student-led events during their interviews.

The student union was referred to during interviews as a form of engagement for students. Participant 6 stated "the student union puts on social events like pubs or bingo which help me to feel engaged but also take my mind off of school" and Participant 10 stated "I joined student council with a friend and we have had bake sales and pubs for students." Participant 12 stated:

> We make like vote a student council and they work to set up events for the class. I think it is good and gets lots of people involved. They also work to plan a party for graduation too. They ask us what we want to see or do. They want our opinions.

Summary

In this study, I aimed to explore how nursing students experience retention strategies and their perceived contributions to academic progress. The research question guiding my study was as follows: How do nursing students experience retention strategies in relation to academic progress? In this chapter, I discussed data analysis, issues of trustworthiness, and results. I conducted 12 semi-structured interviews using Microsoft Teams. Data analysis resulted in the creation of three themes. The three themes are finding balance in personal life and academia, visualization of success, and a sense of belonging.

Based on the results of the interviews, students use a variety of retention strategies that they perceive as contributing to academic progress. These various retention strategies were able to be grouped according to the perceived contribution to academic progress. In the first theme, finding balance in personal life and academia, participants identified the need to encompass self-care and coping strategies to be successful in their programs. In addition, participants spoke highly of the resources provided by the student support office including applicable learning accommodations.

In the second theme, visualization of success, participants referred to their interactions and faculty engagement as directly contributing to their success. Participants stated that with faculty support, they felt as though they could complete the program and enter the healthcare field. Faculty support also assisted in mitigating the heavy workload. The final theme, a sense of belonging, was discussed by participants who valued engaging in additional events such as orientation and student council. Participants valued

group work and study groups, stating that this sense of cohesion allowed for success and prepared them to work as a team in the healthcare field. In Chapter 5, I will further discuss the interpretation of the study findings, study limitations, implications, and recommendations related to future research. I will also describe the impact this study has on positive social change.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive study was to explore how nursing students experience retention strategies and their perceived contributions to academic progress. The retention of nursing students is a multifaceted concern that can be costly and contribute to the ongoing nursing shortage (K. Mitchell et al., 2021). Within educational organizations, retention strategies are available to nursing students; however, selection and implementation are often based on student choice and preference (Smith-Wacholz et al., 2019). Through exploration of students' experiences of retention strategies and their contribution to academic progress, future recommendations based on student experience and perceived effectiveness were made that may enhance student retention.

For this study, I recruited 12 participants. I conducted semistructured interviews using Microsoft Teams. The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed for analysis. From this data analysis, three themes with multiple subthemes were discovered. The three themes were finding balance in personal life and academia, visualization of success, and sense of belonging. The themes alluded to the notion that academic progress is multifaceted, and students use a variety of strategies to be successful. The themes demonstrated that participants value positive interactions with faculty and the support provided by the student success office. In addition, participants referred to the need for balance, which is achieved by enabling strategies focused on physical health, mental health, and social relationships.

Interpretation of the Findings

Finding Balance in Personal Life and Academia

Students face many challenges during their transition to undergraduate studies when entering nursing programs. These challenges include workload, time management, prioritization, lack of coping skills, and a lack of studying and test-taking skills. Attrition rates within nursing programs vary and can reach over 50% within associate degree programs (Priode et al., 2020). Undergraduate nursing programs provide students with an overwhelming amount of information to learn and apply within the classroom and clinical environments (Connelly et al., 2019). The interviews in the current study highlighted the importance of finding a balance between academia and personal life. Participants felt that obtaining the necessary means and skills to find balance contributes to program success and academic progress.

My findings suggest that nursing students feel overwhelmed when they enter undergraduate studies and use strategies to integrate into student life and balance academia and personal lives. The findings from this study reiterate the importance of organizations promoting student-centered activities (see Connelly et al., 2019). In addition, Brown et al. (2021) noted the importance of adequate rest, nutrition, and exercise to maintain a work–life balance. Current participants reiterated the importance of these strategies but also referred to the role social relationships had in their academic progress. The participants in this study felt their social relationships and engagements contributed to academic progress by providing a route for stress relief and debriefing. These relationships included those with other students and friends who were not enrolled

in a nursing program. Participants mentioned formulating bonds with students whom they studied with and socialized with outside of studying or the classroom. In addition, participants referred to the importance of support and involvement from family. These findings align with K. Mitchell et al. (2021) who stated that implementing student-focused strategies allows students to create informal relationships that contribute to success, such as informal gatherings during lunch.

The literature referred to a variety of strategies that focused on three perspectives: the organization, the faculty, and the student. My findings confirm that support from organization-led strategies is beneficial. These strategies included the student support office and learning accommodations. From an organizational perspective, retention strategies within the literature included an extended orientation; the creation of bridging or remediation courses; financial aid including scholarships and stipends; and the implementation of retention programs, specialists, or counselors (Bumby, 2020; Fialkowski et al., 2023; Hawkins et al., 2022). The student support office referenced by current participants encompassed many of these strategies including counseling, but also provided access to learning accommodations. Although organization-focused strategies were mentioned in the literature, no studies referenced the implementation of a student support office comparable to that referenced by the current participants. The literature referred to retention programs that faculty and students can access based on academic performance, attendance, or personal factors (Fialkowski et al., 2023; Hawkins et al., 2022). It is unclear whether the student support office and the retention programs are similar.

Learning accommodations noted by current participants included a note-taker, a recording device, extra time for tests and assignments, and out-of-class testing. The participants felt that using these strategies contributed to academic progress. The literature referenced a variety of retention strategies; however, I was unable to locate literature that discussed learning accommodations and their implications for academic progress. The findings from the current study indicated that students find value in the learning accommodations. During the interviews, participants mentioned it would be beneficial to be provided with information regarding available services and supports at the beginning of the program or during orientation. This aligns with the literature that suggested that retention strategies and efforts are implemented early to increase retention (Everett, 2020).

Visualization of Success

In nursing programs, students find motivation in a variety of ways. Motivation can be fostered through the development of short- and long-term goals personal goals, ensuring a supportive environment, and seeking inspiration from others (Priode et al., 2021). During the interviews, current participants referred to faculty as a major contributing factor to academic progress; faculty's support, approachability, and availability were determining factors in participants' success. In these interactions with faculty, participants identified feeling as though they could succeed in the current course and were capable of being successful in the program. This aligns with Zambas et al. (2020) who stated that because faculty have numerous interactions with students, they must be well-versed in the effects of retention strategies. Furthermore, the creation of a

positive and productive learning environment fosters a caring environment for students. When students gain the perception that faculty care about students' success and outcomes, their perceptions of the learning environment are impacted, which increases their intent to graduate (Wei et al., 2021).

Participants stated that positive faculty interactions provided the opportunity for students to believe they would be able to navigate the assigned workload and program requirements, thereby contributing to academic progress. These interactions included in-class discussions, office availability, and other forms of communication. My findings indicated that students felt they were likely to succeed following a positive interaction with faculty. Furthermore, participants felt that the availability of the faculty member was directly correlated with their academic progress. Participants noted that when faculty responded to their email promptly or had office hours available to meet to discuss course content or concerns, they were more likely to be successful. All faculty did not have the same approach regarding availability.

During the interviews, participants stated that faculty interactions also included clinical instructor availability and preparedness. The literature referred to the impact of clinical orientation, workload, training, and consistency in evaluation approaches as indicative of student retention (Fairfield, 2022). Although the literature discussed clinical placements and instructors in relation to retention (Fairfield, 2022), I was unable to find any literature that related this to academic progress. My findings indicated that clinical instructors require additional support and orientation so they can provide an optimal learning experience for students. In addition, clinical instructors should have a faculty

member readily available to support the implementation of organizational policies and procedures. These suggestions, according to current participants, contribute to academic progress.

During their education, nursing students will encounter a variety of teaching methods. The literature referred to the benefits of enriched teaching approaches as a retention strategy (Bumby, 2020). Furthermore, Everett (2020) stated that these teaching approaches should be student focused. During the interviews, current participants alluded to the various approaches to learning and teaching applied by faculty. My findings indicated that a variety of teaching approaches is the best method of teaching, which contributes to knowledge retention and academic progress. Teaching methods preferred by students included lecture style with the inclusion of PowerPoints, YouTube or video-based learning, and in-class activities such as discussions or group work. Furthermore, participants found value in faculty who understood and were able to apply technology-based learning strategies such as Kahoot.

Sense of Belonging

Before becoming part of a health care team, students enter the field as nursing students. The participants in my study referred to a feeling of comradery for the duration of their program that contributed to academic progress. This aligns with the suggested strategies such as peer mentoring that foster social engagement for students (Rust & Singh, 2022). Current participants stated that interacting with peers in class and study groups allows for the comparison of notes and clarification if required. This confirms the findings of Everett (2020) who found that peer groups can be initiated to enhance support

and success. My findings suggest that implementing student-focused strategies provides students with the opportunity to create informal relationships that contribute to success and academic progress.

Lastly, participants mentioned the benefits of attending orientation and organization-led activities. These activities include orientation and events such as yoga or pubs. Orientation was found by participants to be beneficial and provided an overview of the organization and the program. This is supported by Bumby (2020) who noted that an extended orientation period is a suggested retention strategy. My findings indicated that although participants felt that orientation was beneficial, they stated that orientation could be enhanced by increasing its length or adding additional components such as an introduction to the student success office. These findings align with K. Mitchell et al. (2021) who found that organizations should ensure orientation provides an overview of the online learning environment and library resources.

Theoretical Implications

SCT can describe how retention strategies contribute to academic progress. SCT states that an individual's behavior is affected by expectations of the future, a belief in oneself, and intentions. In the current study, these concepts were factors in student success and academic progress. Furthermore, SCT discusses the reciprocal influence of the self, environment, and behavior (Carlson et al. 2020; Kearney & Garfield, 2019). SCT uses the concepts of behavioral, environmental, and personal factors to explain how individuals acquire new behaviors and skills (Wulfert, 2021). Behavioral factors include motivation, self-efficacy, and self-regulation in relation to the current study. These

factors were noted during the interviews when participants referred to motivating factors such as peer tutoring, study groups, and faculty interactions. Furthermore, participants referred to the benefit of self-efficacy as reiterated in the second theme: visualization of success. Finally, participants stated that through engaging in the noted retention strategies such as faculty engagement, they were provided with the notion that they could be successful in the current course and program.

Environmental factors refer to factors that contribute to behavior development (Wulfert, 2021). In the current study, social support, imitation, and influences were concepts that contributed to student retention. SCT can explain retention strategy selection because it assumes that learning occurs within a social context. Within nursing programs, students are subjected to various social contexts, and gaining further information regarding the reciprocal relationship between the person, environment, and behavior would be beneficial (Wulfert, 2021). Many current participants stated that social support, including colleagues, friends, and family, was essential to their academic progress. In addition, participants noted that environmental influences such as discussion surrounding faculty interaction, the student support office, and learning accommodations. Many participants referred to the importance of orientation in their academic progress. Orientation provides students with an introduction to the organization and their respective programs. This is valuable knowledge for students.

Finally, personal or cognitive factors are significant in creating learning experiences for students in undergraduate education. Personal factors include knowledge and expectations (Bandura, 1977). These factors relate to students' knowledge and

expectations as they enter the program and further develop these concepts. Knowledge is a concept that is continually evolving as students create further understanding regarding the role of a nurse within the health care system. Furthermore, knowledge is essential to ensure academic progress. In comparison, expectations can vary between students and may include the expectations of the nursing program and the expectations found within a nursing career. These expectations may change based on clinical assignments, units, and interactions with faculty and preceptors.

Limitations of the Study

There were limitations to this study. One limitation was the timing of the study. After I received IRB approval, the participants were completing their semester, making recruitment difficult. If the study were repeated during the semester, more robust participation may be obtained. Another limitation was that the participants may not have been honest in discussing their experiences with retention strategies. If participants were not honest, the data would not be accurate. It is difficult to ensure participants were honest during the one-on-one semistructured interviews.

Another limitation that should be considered is that the interview was only audio recorded. Audio recording does not provide the opportunity to report on body language. Finally, researcher bias may have been an additional limitation. Researcher bias could be considered in the interpretation of the results because I am currently employed as a faculty member in a nursing program. In addition, I am a former nursing student who attended both bachelor's and master's level programs.

Recommendations

This study created further understanding regarding retention strategies and their contribution to academic progress from a student lens. Participants noted a variety of strategies that contributed to academic progress, ranging from personality traits and strategies to organization-led strategies. Further qualitative research should try to include participants from other organizations to determine if preferred strategies are different. This is important as the availability of retention strategies may vary based on the organization; therefore, the access to strategies should be better understood.

My findings demonstrated that students value learning accommodations such as a note-taker, a recording device, extra time for tests and assignments, and out-of-class testing. The participants in this study felt that using these strategies contributed to academic progress. The literature references a variety of retention strategies (Bumby, 2020); however, I could not locate literature that discussed learning accommodations and their implications for academic progress. It would be beneficial for future research to focus on learning accommodations and their direct contributions to academic progress. As there are variations in accommodations, it would be beneficial to develop a questionnaire and conduct a quantitative study. Furthermore, future research should explore when, during their program, students were exposed to learning accommodations and how this contributed to academic progress. This is meaningful as participants in this study stated they would prefer early knowledge and access. This also aligns with previous research suggesting retention strategies and efforts are implemented early to increase retention (Everett, 2020).

In addition, further research is needed to determine how students share and create awareness regarding retention strategies available within their respective organizations. In this study, students referenced sharing information regarding the student support office and the offered resources. Participants referred to receiving support from their friends, family, the student support office, faculty, and the organization. The literature does not well understand the sharing of information between students. It would be beneficial to create further knowledge, as this will benefit organizations.

Implications

This study identified various retention strategies used by nursing students enrolled in an RPN program that contributed to academic progress. The study findings included many well-known strategies and highlighted the importance of less-studied strategies such as learning accommodations. Participants mentioned the benefits of learning accommodations such as note-taking, recording devices, or extra time on tests. The inclusion of learning accommodations within the organization assists in bridging gaps in knowledge and language barriers. In addition, learning accommodations provide support to a variety of learning styles. Participants mentioned being audio, visual, or hands-on learners and stated these variations can cause difficulty in knowledge acquisition and retainment. If the organization and faculty use learning accommodations to enhance student performance further, this may contribute to academic progress.

Participants acknowledge the benefits of gaining knowledge early in the program regarding retention strategies that are available. The organization involved in this study encompasses a student support office that faculty or students can self-refer to. However,

it was noted that students are often unaware of these supports until necessary. It is suggested that the organization create awareness so that students can access support early when necessary. Awareness could be commenced during orientation but should also include informal in-class discussions, or technology-based advertisements populated on the LMS used by this program. In addition, faculty and students should be made aware that referral to the student support office is not a negative experience and can contribute to academic progress.

This study contributes to positive social change as the information and knowledge generated will be beneficial for faculty and organizations when designing and facilitating the implementation of retention strategies. In addition, organizations may use this knowledge to develop policies related to the implementation of retention strategies including mandatory referral to retention programs. When offering retention strategies, organizations can enhance the availability of retention strategies based on the student lens and perspective. The findings from this study suggest that students perceive student-centered activities, social relationships, faculty engagement, orientation, learning accommodations, and the student support office as contributing factors to academic progress. Therefore, focus and resources should be allocated to improve accessibility and availability.

In addition, the current nursing shortage is estimated to continue to increase. Nursing shortages can contribute to unsafe environments for patients. If nursing students are successful in their nursing program and complete the National Council Licensure Examination (NCLEX) the community and society would benefit from an increased

number of registered nurses to contribute to the ongoing nursing shortage. As nursing students complete an accredited program, they enter the healthcare field as qualified staff. Additional nurses provide the healthcare system with the ability to meet the growing demands of an ageing population and the increased prevalence of chronic disease. Nurses who are educated and prepared with adequate knowledge improve patient care. Finally, high attrition rates in nursing programs contribute to financial losses to the individual, and both the educational and healthcare organization. Ensuring academic progress can increase funding within the organization that can allow for funding to be allocated to other areas in need.

Conclusion

The retention of nurses is important as healthcare organizations require nurses to function effectively in providing safe and competent care to patients. Without adequate nursing staff, organizations may have unsafe staffing ratios, medication errors, hospital-associated infections, and decreased access to patient care (Garside et al., 2021; Priode et al., 2020). To combat the nursing shortage, an adequate number of nurses must graduate from nursing programs. Organizations employ various retention strategies to increase retention, including an extended orientation, peer and faculty mentorship programs, enhanced faculty engagement, and enriched teaching approaches (Bumby, 2020). Participants were found to use many retention strategies to ensure academic progress. Furthermore, participants identified that student-centered activities, social relationships, enhanced orientation, the student support office, and learning accommodations greatly contributed to academic progress. This study can help to narrow the scope of beneficial

retention strategies according to student preference and contribution to academic progress.

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Appendix A: Recruitment Poster

NURSING RESEARCH

Student Retention and Academic Progression

STUDY TOPIC

Student nurse experiences of retention strategies and the perceives contribution towards academic progression

This study addresses student nurses' experience of retention strategies and the perceived contribution to academic progression. This research is important as it will be beneficial to faculty in advocating for student success using retention strategies.

THIS STUDY INVOLVES:

- A 60 minute one-on-one interview through telephone or Microsoft Teams

ARE YOU ELIGIBLE?

- At least 18 years of age
- Enrolled in the Registered Practical Nursing (RPN) program

IF YOU ARE INTERESTED I IN PARTICIPATING OR HAVE ANY QUESTIONS PLEASE CONTACT:

JESSICA DUGAS, RN, MN

Email: Jessica.dugas@waldenu.edu

Appendix B: Screening Questionnaire

When potential participants respond to the recruitment poster, the following screening questions will be asked to ensure they meet inclusion criteria.

1. What type of nursing program are you attending (e.g. RN, RPN, PSW)?
2. Are you over 18 years of age?
3. What semester of nursing classes are you currently in?
4. Have you had me as an instructor in any of your classes?

Response for Ineligible Participants

Thank you for your interest in participating in my study. Unfortunately, based on the information you have provided, you do not meet the criteria to participate in this study. Thank you for your response and time today.

Response for Eligible Participants

Thank you for your interest in participating in my study and for answering these initial questions. Based on the information you have provided; you are eligible to take part in this study. I will be sending you a consent form to your email.. Should you decide to participate in the study after reading the consent, please send a reply email with the words “I consent”. After I have received that consent, I will send a follow-up email to schedule the interview day and time.

Appendix C: Email to Schedule Interview

Email to Schedule Interview Once Written Consent Received

Thank you for completing the consent form. I would like to schedule the interview for a day and time that is convenient for you. Please answer the questions below regarding your availability and interview format preference.

1. What days and times are you available to schedule for the 1-hour interview?
2. Would you prefer to do the interview by phone or Microsoft teams?

    a) If your preference is by phone, what number should I reach you at on that day?

    b) If your preference is Microsoft teams, I will send you an email with the meeting link for the interview.

This will be an audio only interview so a camera will not be needed and should remain off during the interview. I will confirm with you by phone or email the date and time for the interview. It is recommended that on the day of the interview that you select a location that provides you privacy. Thank you for agreeing to participate in the study and please contact me if you have any further questions or need to change the interview date and time. I can be reached at (redacted phone number) or (redacted email address).

Appendix D: Demographic Questionnaire

Participant Number: _____

What gender do you identify with?

Which of the following age groups are you in?

__ 18-25 __26-35 __36-45 __46-55 __56-65 __66-75 __>75

Which semester and year of the program are you currently in?

Have you received a previous college or university degree?

Appendix E: Interview Guide

Introduction:

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this interview exploring nursing students' experiences of retention strategies and their effects on academic progression. The interview questions with be focused on your experience with challenges encountered, the use of retention strategies, and how they contribute to academic progression. The interview will be approximately 60 minutes in length and will be recorded for transcription purposes.

Are you still willing to have the interview recorded as indicated in the study description? Please also remember that as a participant in this study, you have the right to withdraw or discontinue your consent for participation at any time.

Are you ready to begin?

Questions:

1. What are the challenges faced by nursing students?
2. As a student, what helped you overcome these challenges?
3. What are some specific examples of the supports you used?
4. How did these supports contribute to your success?
5. Describe a time that you needed help overcoming a challenge but did not receive adequate support.
    a) What are some specific examples of support that would have been beneficial during this time?

6. What other supports or resources are available to students within your educational setting?
    a. How do you feel about the supports or resources available to students within your educational setting?
7. From your experience, how does the support received contribute to academic progression?
8. Based on your experience what are some suggestions you have for implementing resources or support within your educational setting?
9. Is there anything else you'd like to share with me before concluding the interview?

Thank you for your participation in this interview. A copy of the transcript will be sent to you via email to review. Would you like to receive a copy of the final study? If so, would you prefer it to be sent to the provided email we have used for correspondence?

Thank you again, your participation is appreciated.

Appendix F: Email to Review Transcript

Thank you for participating in the scheduled interview and answering questions about retention strategies and their effects on academic progression. I have included a copy of your interview transcript, attached to this email. Please review the transcript for accuracy. If any changes are required, or you disapprove of the transcript, please reply within two weeks of this email to allow me to make the required changes. If I do not hear from you within this time frame, I will assume you approve of the transcript and that no changes are necessary. Thank you again for your time and participation.