



Too many is not enough: exploring effective motivation strategies in nursing and midwifery students

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Learning and motivational difficulties encountered by nursing students studying biomedical science have been well-documented (McVicar et al, 2015). Nursing students struggle to acquire and apply foundational physiology and anatomy to clinical procedures, and to adequately meet learning expectations (Birks et al, 2015). The aim of this study was to investigate motivational strategies employed by first year nursing and midwifery students, to determine the types and number of strategies reported, and whether the use of certain strategies is correlated with improved academic performance.

Participants were consenting first year undergraduate students (n=181) at the University of Queensland, undertaking a physiology and anatomy course as part of a nursing and midwifery degree. At a mid point in the semester, students were asked an open ended question to describe the techniques they use to maintain motivation. Responses were subjected to thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Academic performance was assessed using the overall percentage obtained in the course.

Fourteen motivation strategies were identified. The most commonly reported approaches were time management (reported by 47% of students); goal setting (26%); socially driven motivation, where students cited being motivated by their families, studying in groups or comparing themselves to others (21%); and experiencing positive emotions (21%), including interest, enjoyment, challenge and mastery. Students also reported focussing on their future career as a motivational technique (20%), rewarding themselves (18%) or taking breaks (17%).

None of the individual strategies were significantly correlated with academic performance ($p > 0.05$). However, when the strategies were broadly grouped into interest enhancement strategies or goal-based strategies, the goal-based strategies were weakly and positively correlated with academic grade ($r = 0.16$, $p < 0.05$). This is in agreement with previous studies showing that goal-based strategies are more effective than interest-enhancing strategies at increasing academic effort in school and undergraduate students, contributing to improved performance (Schwinger & Otterpohl, 2017). Most students (73%) reported using two or more motivational strategies. The number of motivational strategies reported by students was also weakly, but positively, correlated with final grade ($r = 0.31$, $p < 0.001$), consistent with previous studies showing the effectiveness of employing multiple learning strategies (Simsek & Balaban, 2010).

Together, these findings highlight that engaging with multiple motivational techniques is most beneficial for improving students' academic performance, giving students multiple, individually tailored strategies to draw upon. The findings suggest that interventions to educate and encourage students to engage with multiple motivational strategies, especially those that are goal-based, may be helpful for improving learning outcomes.

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