Skills for Success:
Implementation of a First-Year Nursing Retention Program on Prelicensure Nursing Students

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Introduction

Nursing student attrition remains high, despite recruitment of high performing students. Though the inability to meet the demands of academic rigor may be a primary cause, many students are forced to leave school due to external factors such as, financial hardship and personal stress. The literature supports the use of retention-based activities to support post-secondary students, however, these programs are typically guided by student support staff or academic advisors. This study examined the integration of a retention-based program into the nursing curriculum, and the effects of the year-long program on student retention and students' perceptions related to nursing school acclimation, student retention and success.

Focus Group Themes

Focus Group themes:
• Faculty support
• Mentorship
• Communication
• Relationship
• Decreased stress
• Motivation
• Compassion.

Focus group participants reported that the most beneficial portion of the retention program occurred during the Spring semester, as students had dedicated time to meet with a faculty member and discuss their needs.

Methodology

Students enrolled in a nursing fundamentals course were required to participated in various retention-based activities, including:
• Introduction to campus services/resources
• Education on soft skills for success
• Identification of helpful community resources
• Introduction of other concepts

Optional retention-based activities continued throughout the Spring Semester. This was a mixed methods study. Using an independent sample t-test, the first year retention rates for the academic year 2014-2015 were compared to those of academic year 2016-2017. Focus group participants were interviewed to explore their perceptions of nursing school integration, the overall effectiveness of the retention program and their perceived needs for continued matriculation and success.
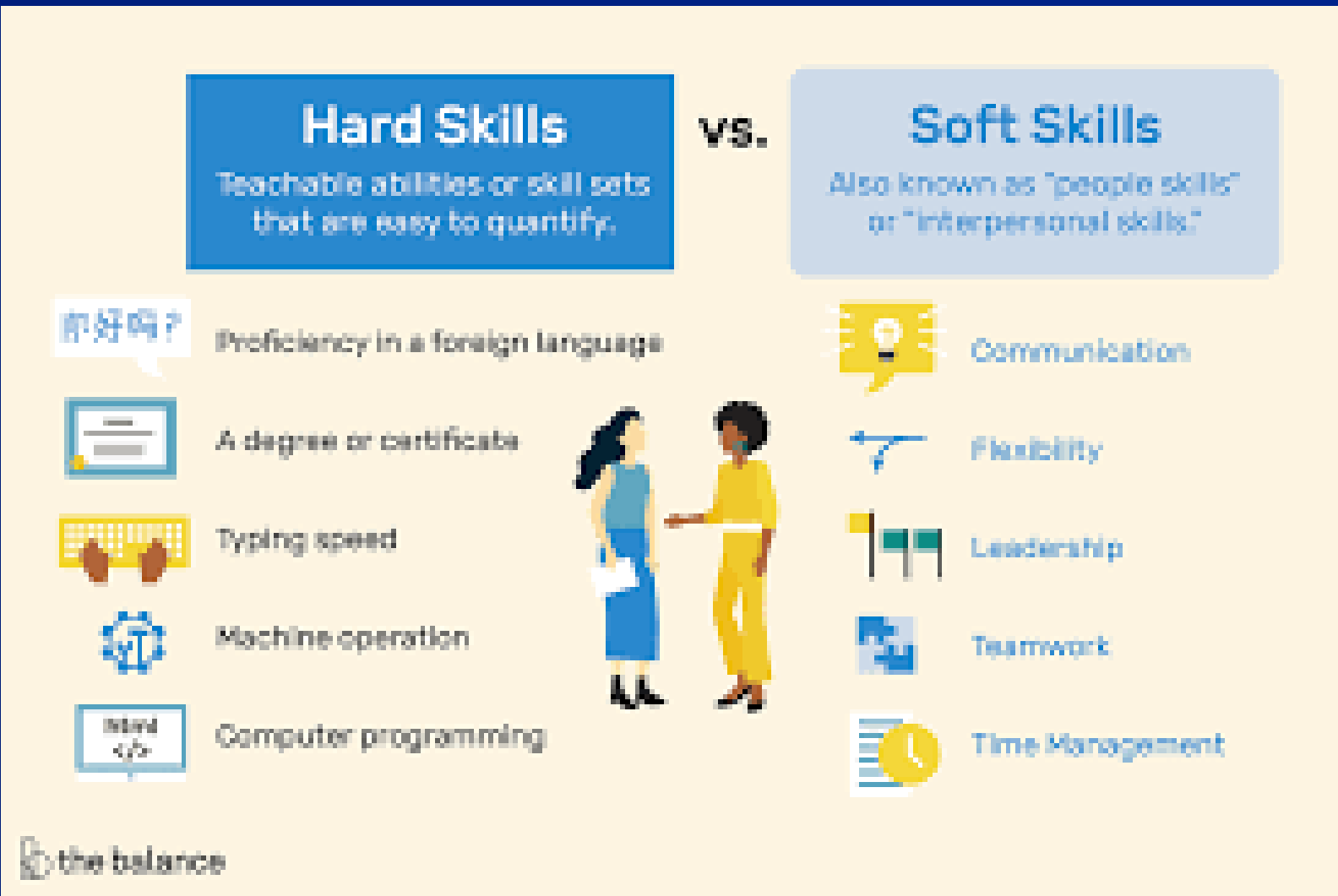
Results

Pearson r correlation coefficient of 1 indicates strong relationship between retention and integration of soft skills training in the first year of nursing school.

	ADN	BSN
2014-2015	25 of 36 (0.6944)	30 of 38 (0.7894)
2016-2017	17 of 22 (0.7727)	33 of 36 (0.9166)

Application to Nursing Education

• Faculty should identify ways to have more open dialogue with students to identify their personalized needs

• Schools and programs of nursing should collaborate more closely with departments across campus, as well as community partners, to identify available resources that may benefit students

• Nursing faculty should work to identify resources that will alleviate some of these burdens, and create an environment that allows the student to focus more directly on their learning.

Conclusion

Students reported that their perception of faculty, their comfort and confidence in the program, and their motivation improved. Soft skills instruction during the fall semester helped their assimilation into the nursing program, and provided helpful information about on and off-campus resources available to them. Student participants especially appreciated information about local food banks, bill payment assistance, child care assistance and discount medical services. With recent research revealing that many of our post-secondary students suffer from poverty and even homelessness, nursing faculty should work to identify resources that will alleviate some of these burdens, and create an environment that allows the student to focus more directly on their learning.

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Full reference list available upon request