

Experiences of Advanced Standing Program Nursing Students and Instructors Practicing Transcendental Meditation

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ABSTRACT

Little is known about the experiences of Advanced Standing Program (ASP) nursing students and instructors who practice Transcendental Meditation® (TM®). The purpose of this qualitative study was to uncover themes from the written descriptions of ASP nursing students and instructors who were taught to practice TM in order to gain a deeper understanding of how this practice might have meaning for and influence their lives and well-being. At the same time, discovering ways that TM could be incorporated into nursing education and practice as an effective stress reduction intervention and opportunity to enhance nursing care. Thematic analysis was employed. Twenty students and three instructors volunteered and were provided with education sessions by certified TM teachers involving the correct way to practice TM twice per day. Written descriptions were collected via written monthly reflective journals over 11 months. Descriptions were analyzed from the journal entries, uncovering major themes describing the experiences of participants when practicing TM and the resulting positive impact on their lives for managing stress, enhancing productivity, and improving relationships. In conclusion, recommendations involve the use of TM to be introduced and implemented as a useful stress reduction intervention tool in nursing programs for students and their instructors.

KEYWORDS: Transcendental Meditation, nursing students, nursing instructors, advanced standing nursing program, thematic analysis, qualitative research.

Background

Our university offers various stress reduction programs within Student Services, which include online workshops and programs (University of New Brunswick-Canada, 2023). Mindfulness meditation has become quite popular as it can be learned online or via textbooks (Bonadonna, 2003; Kabat-Zinn, 1993; Rosenthal, 2011; van der Riet et al., 2018). On the other hand, Transcendental Meditation® (TM®) is taught uniformly by certified instructors. The TM

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technique is considered unique and is categorized as automatic self-transcending as compared to other meditation practices, which are labeled as focused attention or open monitoring (Travis & Shear, 2010). TM is an effortless technique associated with integrated brain functioning, which is not based on religion or other beliefs (Nestor et al., 2023). TM has been shown very effective in the quantitative results of more than 600 published research studies at over 200 independent research institutions and universities in the last 40+ years, indicating that TM effectively decreases stress and has health benefits for the body, behavior, and mind (Azizoddin et al., 2021; Bonamer & Aquino-Russell, 2019; Chalmers et al., 1989; David Lynch Foundation, 2023 b; Nestor et al. 2023; Orme-Johnson & Farrow, 1977; Orme-Johnson et al. 2011; Valosek, Nidich, Grant, Peterson, & Nidich, 2021; Wallace et al., 1990). It was also determined in other studies that in comparison to control groups, a substantial increase in IQ was observed across a period of two years amongst university students who regularly practiced TM (So & Orme-Johnson, 2001). Moreover, TM has been implemented in elementary and high schools to assist students and bring about transformations in learning (Bleasdale et al., 2019; Campion & Rocco, 2009; Colbert, 2013; Rosaen & Benn, 2006; Rosenthal, 2011; Vela-Valenzuela, 2013). During the COVID-19 pandemic, the practicality of administering Transcendental Meditation (TM)² education to emergency clinicians and frontline healthcare providers was demonstrated. For example, resulting in substantial amelioration of burnout and psychological maladies, such as reductions in burnout levels, as well as decreased symptoms of depression, anxiety, stress, somatization, insomnia and sleep disruption, emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and improvement of well-being (Azizoddin et al., 2021; Nestor et al., 2023)

From a qualitative perspective, the significance of having TM in their lives has been described by graduate nursing students from an American university in a noteworthy, and first-published, phenomenological study (Perkins & Aquino-Russell, 2017). It was perceived by the participants that they became more genuinely present with patients, family members, managers, and fellow students following the adoption of this simple technique. “Feelings of peacefulness, bliss, and integrity were also experienced by participants, which enhanced the experience of sacred space amidst everyday stressors, while compassion, gratitude, grace, appreciation, and care were inherent within” (Perkins & Aquino-Russell, 2017, p. 163). Presence, authenticity, integrity, and caring facilitated appreciation of “the good, the true, and the beautiful” (McIntosh, 2015, p. 53) in relationships, as well as health, healing, and well-being in participants (Perkins & Aquino-Russell, 2021).

The TM technique is a conventional meditation modality that originated in the age-old Vedic tradition (Nader, 1995; Roth, 2002). This meditation practice was revived and reinstated by Maharishi Mahesh Yogi according to the traditional Vedic texts. Since 1957, the TM approach has been taught all over the world. In the past 60 years, roughly 6 million individuals worldwide have taken part in the standardized TM Program (Rosenthal, 2011). TM should be practiced twice per day by sitting comfortably and keeping the eyes closed.

The Advanced Standing Nursing Program (ASP) is a compressed and accelerated Bachelor of Nursing (BN) degree Program. It was designed for students, who have another degree or university credit hours, in order to complete the BN degree within two eleven-month terms. From our daily experiences as faculty members, ASP nursing students and instructors often experience high levels of stress due to the rigorous academic demands of the Program, as well as the pressures of their professional and personal lives. This stress can negatively impact their overall well-being, which can, in turn, impact their ability to perform well in the Program and in their future careers

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as caring nurses (Watson, 2018). One potential solution to this problem is the practice of TM, which has been shown to reduce stress and improve overall health and well-being for nurses (Bonamer & Aquino-Russell, 2019). However, little is known about the experiences of ASP nursing students and instructors who practice TM and how this practice may impact their academic and professional performance, as well as their overall well-being. There has been limited qualitative research focusing on the TM technique (Perkins & Aquino-Russell, 2017). Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative study was to uncover themes from their written experiences in order to gain a deeper understanding of what the practice of TM was like for them and to determine if this practice could benefit other students and faculty members in the ASP.

Method

Design

Following learning to practice TM, a qualitative research process was utilized where participants were asked to write monthly journal entries in a confidential Desire to Learn (D2L) platform describing what it was like for them to practice TM while being engaged in their teaching-learning journey with the Nursing ASP. The confidential D2L platform was deliberately constructed with the aim of safeguarding the anonymity of its users, enabling them to submit their journals with complete confidentiality and anonymity. This program was fortified with stringent security measures, such as password protection, to ensure the utmost protection and confidentiality of the submitted data journal descriptions. Thematic analysis was performed, which is “the analysis of narrative data [or in this case, written journal descriptions] to identify prominent themes and patterns among the themes” (Loiselle et al., 2007, p. 395). This method is ideal for studying phenomena when little information is available, as it helps to elucidate and deepen the understanding of ideas associated with the experience (Louiselle et al., 2011).

Sample

All students (N=88) and instructors (N=14) in the ASP at a satellite campus of a Canadian university were invited and eligible to participate in this study. Participants were recruited via multiple channels, including electronic communication through email, advertisement on study information posters displayed on bulletin boards, and personal referrals through word-of-mouth. Initially, the purposeful sample included 25 students and five instructors. Written informed consent was given by all participants, and the fact that they could withdraw from the study at any point in the study without consequence was known to them. Within the course of the research, five students and two instructors withdrew from the study (with no repercussions), resulting in a total of 20 students and three instructors who completed the 11 months of the study. For the confidentiality and anonymity of participants, only self-chosen pseudonyms were requested from them because they were located on the same campus as the researchers.

TM Educational Program

Funding was provided by the Canadian Women’s Wellness Initiative (2023), which included remuneration for the TM teachers. Four certified TM teachers traveled from the East and West Coasts of Canada to our campus to teach the participants using a consistent approach. These teachers led the four-day standardized TM education program for participants. In the TM program, individual, as well as group meetings were held with TM teachers at the campus. As part of the

structured follow-up program, in the first month following learning TM, all participants met a TM teacher once per week as part of checking meetings that lasted one hour, and then once a month as required by the TM teachers and the participants.

The TM teachers collaborated with participants and organized the meetings according to the participants' schedules. The participant students and instructors were to practice TM every day for 20 minutes in the morning and afternoon throughout the study duration. Ideally, according to the TM teachers, a regular practice could be established in 11 months, which was also the duration of the study year of the BN ASP.

Journal Description Collection

The participants were asked to record their perceptions and experiences for 11 months regarding their practice of TM while being involved in their teaching-learning journey. Participants submitted individual electronic journal entries on a confidential platform every month for the entire study duration, possibly amounting to 11 journal entries for each participant.

It was expected that 253 (23 x 11) written journal submissions would be made; however, 69 submissions were received in all, the lengths of which ranged from one to two lines of typing, to two to three paragraphs, to three pages of description per month. Written journal entry descriptions were provided by 18 out of the 20 student participants and three instructor participants. The number of submissions for each participant from those who provided written descriptions was in the range of one to 10. It was observed that higher entries were submitted by participants early on (during months one to five) in comparison to the latter stages of the study, and almost all participants submitted a written description in the first month, with just two submissions being received in the last month. This happened even though several measures had been taken to encourage submissions, such as two emails to each participant every month--including a submission reminder every month and a second email reminding participants of the deadline for the submission for that particular month. Though the number of submissions decreased over the months, we believe that the data obtained from the 69 submissions were adequate for carrying out thematic analysis.

Ethics and Human Rights

Numerous measures were implemented to safeguard the human rights of the persons who participated in this study, especially students, as they were considered members of a vulnerable population. First, we worked in close collaboration with the Ethical Review Committee in the Faculty of Nursing, as well as the Research Ethics Board at the university, to ensure that the study was conducted in an ethical manner that prioritized the participants' rights and interests. This study was given ethical approval by two institutional review boards: the Ethical Review Committee in the Faculty of Nursing, as well as the Research Ethics Board at the university. As researchers, we treated the participants with fairness, cultural sensitivity, and respect. The possibility of coercion was addressed by implementing various measures to ensure that participants were not unduly influenced or pressured to take part in the study. These measures included providing detailed information about the study and consent forms were explained to and signed by the participants themselves. The voluntary nature of participation was emphasized, and participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Students were also informed that their academic grades would not be influenced by whether they chose to participate or not. TM instructors signed a confidentiality agreement before training the participants. Additionally, all data, whether in hard or soft copy, were securely stored in a locked filing cabinet in a private office

at the Faculty of Nursing, which could only be accessed by the principal investigator. Furthermore, computerized research information was stored in specially designated research files that were only accessible to the project researchers.

Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis (TA) was used in this qualitative research. It is “a method for systematically identifying, organizing, and offering insight into patterns of meaning (themes). Through focusing on meaning across [journal descriptions], TA allows the researcher to see and make sense of collective or shared meanings and experiences” (Braun & Clarke, 2012, p. 57). Steps of TA, as described by Erlingsson and Brysiewicz (2017), were utilized. The initial step of the analysis involved multiple readings of the journal descriptions in developing a comprehensive understanding of each participant’s perspectives and main ideas. Next, the text was divided into smaller meaning units, which were then further condensed without losing the core meaning. These condensed meaning units were colour-coded and grouped into categories in the subsequent step. In the final step, these categories were condensed further to develop overarching themes that captured the essence or meaning of the participants' experiences and perspectives.

Students’ Themes

Themes from student participants’ journal descriptions of what it was like to practice TM during their teaching-learning journey included the following: examples of participants’ own words taken directly from their journal entries.

Trouble Finding Time. It was determined by the nursing student participants that it was difficult to schedule time and space for practicing TM twice every day, along with the tough course burden and clinical praxis of the BN ASP as verbalized by participants themselves and reported in the literature (Hegge & Larson, 2008; Labrague et al., 2017). One participant wrote:

Challenging to change my schedule to fit it [TM] in, as it hasn’t become a habit yet, but plan to set a reminder in my phone so I don’t forget.

Another participant wrote,

Initially, I found it very challenging to stay seated and focused on this mantra for 20 minutes. I was restless, I felt impatient and overwhelmed by all the things on my to do list. After beginning this daily ritual, the benefits were almost immediate. As time passed, it became easier to be still and to take comfort in this short period of silence. I began to understand what the teachers meant by effortlessly favoring the mantra and of how they couldn’t afford not to practice their daily meditation... Now meditation is such an important part of my day. It is the first thing I do when I wake up, even before coffee (which in itself is impressive for me).

Enhanced Vitality, Sleep, Insight, and Performance. Student participants described improved sleep and increased vitality, vigor, and energy being consistently experienced when they practiced TM sessions regularly. In addition, it was also described by participants that with routine TM practice, there was an improvement in their academic performance, productivity, and concentration. One participant wrote:

The meditation went well. I felt more energy that lasted throughout the day.

Another participant wrote,

The benefits of this meditation practice far exceeded my expectations. I assumed I would feel calmer, maybe more focused or well rested. While those things did occur, they were the result of something greater. I found that through taking the time to sit alone in silence with myself, I was able to get to truly know myself, in a way that I wasn't aware I hadn't.

Another participant indicated that “TM allows my brain to recharge and refocus. I find after TM I am more productive and motivated to do the tasks that need to be done, both in academics and home life.” Yet, another participant wrote, “I have noticed a difference in my performance being better in the sense that I am more energized and focused and less stressed.” Similarly, another participant reported, “I feel that I am able to sleep better and feel more energized while in class, that has to an extent helped my productivity.” And, finally, a participant confirmed that, “some days I don't even feel I need caffeine after my meditation because I feel so energized.”

Decrease in Stress, Replaced with Calming Tranquility. Student participants described that there was also a decrease in their stress levels, which were replaced with increased feelings of repose, calm, tranquility, restfulness, and peace following TM practice. One participant found that, “practicing TM has helped me remain calm in stressful situations. I no longer get stressed before midterms...I have... focus while studying for midterms.” Another participant confirmed this finding, “engaging in the practice of TM is helpful in dealing with the stresses associated with this program.” And another participant indicated that their family noticed the influence of TM, “my family has noticed me being much calmer after meditation.”

Relationships were Enhanced with Inner Peace and More Confidence. It was indicated by student participants that their relationships with others improved as they became more capable of empathizing and inspiring passion in others, with an increase in their own self-confidence. Their conscious awareness of seeing themselves in others was described by participants, in addition to feelings of harmony and linkages with all others. One of the participants indicated, “TM has assisted with my overall relationships thus far, as well as with my patients.” Another participant wrote, “I also find I am handling clinical easier and am not being so hard on myself when I am unsure of something, as though I found inner peace.” One of participants explained the deep influence of TM on their relationships with self and with others,

The benefits of this meditation practice far exceeded my expectations... Through this greater understanding of self, I began to feel confident and comfortable enough to deepen my connection with others. I also began to see myself in everyone, the things I loved and even the things I disliked; both of which enabled me to experience a greater appreciation for them. I started to see life through a different lens.

Compatible with the above quotation, two different participants indicated respectively: “TM has enabled me to open up to others and make deeper connections with them,” and “TM brings an increased ability to understand others, in ways of emotions and actions. I find I am more aware and considerate of how others are feeling in situations.”

Positive Views for the Future and Gratitude. Student participants described that they now faced the future with faith, conviction, and an increased sense of their goals for life. The participants were thankful for the opportunity to learn TM, and it was even asserted by participants that they could not imagine a day without practicing TM. One participant shared their lived experience of practicing TM,

I began to experience gratitude in ways I could have never imagined. Instead of viewing experiences as something I “had to do”, I began to see them as opportunities that I was fortunate to be blessed with. As I developed a greater sense of inner security, external factors were less daunting. The sense of worry about the future and of the unknown that I was once so familiar with, was replaced with a sense of trust.

Another participant concurred with the above participant, “TM has brought me a great sense of appreciation and gratitude for life and for the people surrounding me. I have become more patient, more loving, more accepting and overall, increasingly more peaceful in my daily life.” A third participant confirmed, “I couldn’t image a day without practicing TM. I am very grateful for the opportunity to learn this meditation practice and I have truly benefited in every area of my life.”

Instructors’ Themes

The themes from instructor participants’ journal descriptions of what it was like to practice TM during their teaching-learning journey in the BN ASP included the following, with direct quotations from their journal descriptions.

Enhanced Clarity of Thought, Efficiency, and being Well-Rested. After practicing TM regularly, instructor participants described an increase in the clarity of thought, decision-making abilities, organization, productivity, concentration, and rationality. One participant reported,

I find the twice-daily meditation very relaxing. Afterward my thoughts are somewhat clearer. For example, today I noted improvement in my ability to write feedback/evaluation comments on a student’s performance that I had been struggling with prior to meditation. The words flowed more easily and accurately reflected what I had been having difficulty putting down on paper earlier... I see that my thoughts are clearer and more organized. I do not feel as overwhelmed and pulled in multiple directions as I have in past. ... To summarize my feelings, I definitely see the benefits of TM to my sense of thought clarity, confidence, and calm.

Another participant wrote, “after meditating (and I find I need to take a couple of minutes to allow myself to “come out” of it at a gentle pace), I feel great! I feel awake and so much more rested. It makes such a difference in the way my day begins.”

Feelings of Empowerment, Productivity, and Receptivity to Change of Perspectives. Instructor participants described that they felt more empowered with knowledge and ways to become more receptive to change. One participant reflected, “I am enjoying the “stillness” that TM provides. When I feel anxious or pulled in a hundred different directions TM is centering. After TM I always feel more in control and know which choice/direction is right for me.” A second participant showed,

I have already found that my TM practice has benefitted me in several ways. Most notably, I have found that I have more productive time in the evenings. Previously, after busy/long days I would often collapse on the couch after my son was settled in bed, too exhausted even to get myself to bed, let alone accomplish any additional evening tasks. After my early evening practice, even though I initially feel groggy for a short time, I find that I am much more alert and clear-headed throughout the evening.

A third participant found, “with TM, as we gain insight our perspectives change, and I am more accepting of this gentle shift in these perspectives.”

Health was Enhanced Through Self-Reflection with Calmness and Decreased Stress. Instructor participants described not only experiencing a feeling of calm, peace, balance, and decreased stress at work and home, but also an improvement in their own health. In addition, they experienced several health benefits, particularly when TM was practiced after yoga, leaving them feeling transformed, rejuvenated, and restored. One participant explained,

A feeling of calm is easier to access...I have become less reactionary. I can step back and not feel the need to react right away. I have a calmness that allows me to think before reacting. This has enhanced my patience with and reflection on life's challenges.

Another participant discovered,

That doing TM immediately following yoga is a great experience. The yoga seems to prepare me for TM and get focused on the mantra quicker and more deeply. The two practices together have an additive effect while it is beneficial for my mind-body health.

Another participant commented “I always feel refreshed after meditating.”

Enhanced Insight of Self, More Compassion for and Presence with Others. With TM practice, instructor participants gained invigorated insight into themselves and felt that they exhibited greater intuitiveness, as well as increased compassion, which became quite evident to others. One participant found,

That doing TM has allowed me to be more grounded and present with the students. ... TM has become part of my daily routine. In reflecting over the past 3 months, I have found it easier to engage with students, and am more sensitive to their anxieties and concerns. This deeper insight allows me to support them.

Another participant indicated,

I believe there are times I have much more patience with the people in my life. This has also helped with my interactions with the ASP BN students...TM has helped me through some personal situations and difficult life transitions, making it much easier to be present in the teaching-learning environments.

A third participant showed,

Positive changes in day-to-day interactions with students. I find I am more insightful of their positions / perceptions, and able to be more attentive to their needs and inquiries with fewer distracting thoughts. It is easier to be present and in-the-moment in one-to-one student-faculty interactions which has resulted in more effective communication.

Finding Time is Challenging. Time, commitment issues, and willingness to sit still were some challenges faced by instructor participants, as they were not always able to practice two times every day. One participant reported, “It has been a challenging month to fit TM into my schedule in the proper way (i.e. twice per day for 20 minutes) given how busy December tends to be.” Another participant wrote, “my biggest challenge has been doing TM regularly.” Another participant faced the same challenge,

The one challenge I have been working on this month is figuring out how to schedule in my 20-minute practice, twice every day... With traveling for work one day per week, clinical shift work, and busy weekend activities, my days and evenings are quite variable.

Gratitude for Having the Opportunity to Learn TM. Instructor participants described feeling grateful for having the opportunity to learn TM, even though they may have wondered if they could actually shift to higher levels of consciousness. However, with repeated TM practice, participants described being impressed with the values and effects of the TM process. One participant believed that,

TM is a gift - it provides a long lasting “quiet” for the mind which can be accessed as a tool for calm consideration during our everyday challenges and anxieties. The longer I practice TM, I see the benefits. It is a bit like a layer of calm that acts like a buffer to life’s struggles. The quiet and peace puts into perspective many of the small worries I would have let take control in the past. Instead of the anxiety filling me up inside I feel like I can see the issues from a distance and put them into a more realistic perspective. How this relates to the “teaching-learning journey” is that I can “let go” a bit and enjoy the creative process the students develop and engage in during this course. I have more faith that the learning activities will work out well and the learning experience will be beneficial.

Another participant wrote, “I am thankful for being included in this study.” Another participant reflected,

The journey to our destination was an exhausting few day, aboard four different airplanes across three continents. Nine to 11-hour flights take a toll on me. I don’t sleep well (or much at all) on airplanes. But I can meditate! ... I was extremely grateful for my TM practice while traveling. Even if I did not sleep well on the airplanes, I put my earplugs in, closed my eyes, sat comfortably with a blanket, and enjoyed my lovely practice, many times over those traveling days. And it was quite something: Even

though I have to think I slept the least of everyone in the group, I felt alert and clear-headed while navigating all of the aspects of our traveling journey. Students who are, of course, much younger than me and who slept on each plane were yawning and groggy and dragging through airports, and I felt really good. I was extremely thankful for that.

Trustworthiness

During data collection and analysis, we used four different terms to refer to techniques that can help ensure the reliability of their study: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). We ensured credibility by collaborating with each other throughout the research process and regularly discussing and providing feedback to each other. We also practiced reflexivity by reflecting on our own knowledge, experience, and beliefs about the subject of our study (Carpenter, 2007; Creswell, 2013). We recognized that dependability cannot exist without credibility and therefore, we made sure that the data journal descriptions we collected and analysed in a credible way to ensure dependability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, 2000). Confirmability was achieved by documenting in detail the research process and methods used for journal description collection and thematic analysis. We also aimed to ensure that our study findings have meaning to others in similar situations by describing how the findings could make sense to other people who experience similar circumstances as the participants.

Discussion

This study sought to describe thematic perceptions of students and instructors in the BN ASP teaching-learning experience following TM practice. We had the aim of determining perceptions of whether TM might help them in experiencing less stress related to nursing school, as has been described in the literature (Perkins & Aquino-Russell, 2017). When student nurses in our study practiced TM regularly, they reported improved academic performance and focus. They experienced lower levels of stress, with increased feelings of calm, repose, restfulness, composure, tranquility, and peace. Increased peace, repose, ability to focus and sleep were also experienced by nursing instructors, and their productivity increased. The participants described experiencing increased well-being and feelings of being invigorated. The above findings are consistent with the qualitative literature (Perkins & Aquino-Russell, 2017, 2021). They also described having gained insights of themselves, connections and attentive or authentic presence with others, as well as a feeling of harmony, which again is consistent with the literature (Perkins & Aquino-Russell, 2017, 2021).

There are both similarities and differences between the themes reported by students and instructors who practiced TM. The first similarity is the challenge of finding time to practice TM, which was mentioned by both students and instructors. The second similarity is the enhanced vitality, performance, and clarity of thought reported by both groups. Additionally, both students and instructors reported a decrease in stress and an increase in calmness and inner peace. Lastly, both groups expressed gratitude for the opportunity to learn and practice TM, all of which are congruent with Perkins & Aquino-Russell's (2017, 2021) findings.

On the other hand, there were also some differences between the themes reported by students and instructors. For instance, instructors reported feeling more empowered and productive, whereas students reported that their relationships were enhanced with more confidence. Instructors also reported that their health was enhanced through self-reflection with calmness and

decreased stress, while students expressed positive views for the future. Another difference was that instructors reported an increased receptivity to change of perspectives, while students did not mention this as a theme. Overall, while there are similarities in the themes reported by students and instructors, their experiences with TM were unique and influenced by their own individual personal and professional contexts.

Our study's qualitative results align with previous quantitative research and are consistent with those of the literature presented at the beginning of this article, indicating that practicing TM by students has a positive effect on both mental and physical health, as well as various human behaviors. According to Barnes et al. (2001), MacLean et al. (1997), and Walton et al. (2004), the TM technique can quantitatively reduce psychological and physiological responses to stressors, including the decreased sympathetic nervous system and hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal axis over activation, and reductions in elevated cortisol levels. Travis et al. (2009) and Raingruber and Robinson (2007) found that TM quantitatively promotes a more coherent and integrated style of brain functioning, which is associated with lower stress reactivity. Furthermore, students who participated in TM research had significantly reduced perceived stress, anxiety, anger, depression, fatigue, sleep disturbance and increased self-esteem compared to control groups that engaged in silent reading (Azizoddin et al., 2021; Nestor et al., 2023; Vela-Valenzuela et al., 2021), and experienced increased resilience (Wendt et al., 2015). A study conducted by Burns et al. (2011) investigated the impact of TM on stress, anxiety, depression, and perfectionism in a college population; they found a positive impact on these variables. Bleasdale et al. (2019) emphasized that practicing TM by students positively influenced social/emotional well-being. In addition, Colbert (2013) suggested that practicing TM might increase graduation rates in schools. Moreover, Vela-Vaenzuela et al. (2021) found that students who practiced TM twice daily during the school day displayed increased intellectual ability, personal well-being, and higher national examination scores at post-test compared to a matched group of control students from the same school. Many of these findings have been confirmed in our qualitative descriptions and thematic analysis of the experience of TM with ASP students.

Findings of the experiences of instructors who practiced TM were also compatible with the findings from previous studies. Prior studies have demonstrated that TM can enhance one's resilience, foster better connections with others, and promote positive emotional states, such as joy, happiness, optimism, effective coping mechanisms, and self-realization, among other benefits (Alexander et al., 1991; Azizoddin et al., 2021; Nidich et al., 2009; Valosek et al., 2019; Valosek et al., 2021; Wendt et al., 2015.).

Implications and Recommendations

TM is an effective stress reduction intervention. The findings of this study indicate that TM is a valuable addition to stress reduction and could be included in student and faculty health services and wellness programs aimed at university students and faculty members, as suggested by Nestor et al. (2023) for frontline healthcare professionals. TM has the potential to assist those who are involved in BN ASP in managing stress, which is becoming more prevalent in nursing programs. Therefore, nursing programs could collaborate with qualified educators to provide TM training and group practice opportunities, both for nursing students and for their faculty members who express interest in stress reduction.

There are various implications of TM for nursing instructors in clinical practice and in classrooms when relating research findings from clinical nurses to our participants because our participants practice nursing with patients and families too as role models for students (Bonamer & Aquino-Russell, 2019). TM may also enhance the cognitive function, creativity, and teaching

abilities of nursing instructors, leading to innovative teaching strategies and effective communication with students, as our instructor participants described. Additionally, the practice of TM may lead to better student outcomes, including improved academic performance, as described by our participants. Finally, TM can improve emotional well-being, resilience and reduce burnout rates among nursing instructors (Bonamer & Aquino-Russell, 2019). Incorporating TM into the daily routine of nursing instructors could potentially have numerous positive impacts on their personal and professional lives, as described by our participants.

One of the challenges our participants described was finding time to practice TM twice daily. This is not unlike other studies' findings (Bonamer & Aquino-Russell, 2019; Perkins & Aquino-Russell, 2017). What is imperative and recommended is for university administration to reset the culture of their organizations to ensure that there is a set time aside for the practice of meditation (of note, this group meditation practice time occurs at the Maharishi International University (2023) in Fairfield, Iowa). Group meditation has been found to reduce national stress in the United States (Orme-Johnson et al., 2022). Another recommendation is to add TM education as a part of or an elective for the BN ASP or any other academic program. TM training courses can be offered to students at the very beginning of their nursing program during their orientation days as an extracurricular activity. Nursing students must complete CPR certification and Suicide Prevention training courses prior to or during their program. TM could be added as a 'self-care' tool to assist students with the known stressors that are a component of the ASP. Nursing students, like many other students, have a heavy workload and a demanding curriculum. It can be challenging to find time to practice Transcendental Meditation (TM) during the school day. However, one of the benefits of TM is that it can be practiced anywhere, including at home. By practicing TM at home, nursing students could reap the benefits of this powerful technique without interrupting their courses during the school day. Moreover, practicing TM at home can be a convenient way for nursing students to integrate this technique into their busy schedules. They can choose to practice TM in the morning before starting their day (as our participants described), during a break between classes, or in the evening after completing their coursework. We believe that self-care must be a focus for our healthcare professionals in order to diminish burnout and enhance retention (Bonamer & Aquino-Russell, 2019).

It is interesting that with a program entitled, *Heal the Healers*, The David Lynch Foundation (2023 a) has worked with medical schools in the United States, introducing TM to their students with positive results. For example, at Loyola University's Stritch School of Medicine in Chicago, medical students are offering a for-credit elective program entitled "Physician Wellness through Transcendental Meditation." (David Lynch Foundation, 2023 a). To date, more than 350 medical students have learned TM, with more students learning all the time based on positive reports. All healthcare professionals today are in need of ways to diminish the stress resulting from our challenging healthcare environments. In conclusion, despite a heavy curriculum, practicing TM regularly as a lifelong intervention can have many benefits for students during their studies or later when they become nurses in their clinical settings. The time invested in TM can lead to improved academic performance, better mental and emotional well-being, and an overall improved quality of life.

Limitations and Strengths

The limitations of the current study were related primarily to participants finding time and space to meditate. We believe that the space to carry out TM on campus was an issue for the duration of the study. The time that participants had to give to TM practice may have been affected by and possibly restricted by a change in start time for classes, which occurred at the beginning of

the study on our campus. In our study plan, we had hoped that students would come for group meditations at 0830 and be ready for their 0900 classes; however, the start time of classes was modified to 0830 instead of 0900. This meant that students had to travel earlier during rush hour, and this may have made it difficult for them to reach the campus as early as they may have preferred. In addition, students were not allowed access to our building until 0815, which hampered our goal in having group meditations in a specific location before the classes started in the morning, as there would be very little time left for the students to practice TM during the fullness of their day. In the ASP schedule during the time of our study, there were two extensive days of back-to-back classes and three full days of clinical (0700-1500 hours in hospital or community settings) every week. Students had the option of using a specifically designated space at the end of the day on the campus; however, for three days per week, students were either not present in the building or did not get the time to practice in the allocated space at the end of their day. Thus, as the students and faculty had busy work, study, and family schedules, they persistently recognized finding time to practice TM two times a day as a challenge. This had an impact on the use and potential interest in TM as a practice and so we suggest that in the future, this plan should be handled more appropriately when educational programs are being planned and executed. Even amidst the time challenges, the willingness and the intention to continue TM practice were expressed by most study participants. They also expressed their gratitude for having learned TM and taking part in the study.

Conclusions

The descriptions of experiences of students and instructors in practicing TM twice every day indicate that TM did have an impact on them positively in managing their stress, influencing their well-being, and enhancing their productivity and relationships with others. It is recommended that TM be introduced to nursing students as part of the BN ASP for the profession of nursing is indeed stressful (Bonamer & Aquino-Russell, 2019), and nurses are in need of stress reduction interventions both during their education (Martos-Pulindo et al., 2012; Michalec et al., 2013; Watson, 2018) and after graduation. As Watson (2018) contends, nurses must care for selves before they can care for others.

The desire to altruistically help and care is a hallmark of caring excellence in all areas of nursing practice, whether expressed in clinical, educational, or community settings. This altruistic approach begins with self and radiates to individuals, groups, communities, and beyond. (Sitzman & Watson, 2017, p. 26)

We believe that if there is the desire for nurses to truly care for others in their professional practice environments, we, in nursing educational programs, must let go of our past perspectives, which include putting others first and ourselves last. We must recognize the importance of not only teaching skills and tasks for performing nursing and medical care, but also including stress reduction techniques for nursing students and instructors in order to ensure that they take care of themselves. Watson (2018) described caring in nursing education to include learning about self through caring and meditative practices both in and outside of the classroom. Our mission in nursing is to care for others; we must realize that one cannot give from an empty cup. TM is a strategy which quantitatively and qualitatively has proven to be helpful for nurses, nursing students, and nursing instructors so that they may help themselves.

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Manuscript received March 16, 2023

Final revision received April 6, 2023

Accepted April 19, 2023