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Nursing Education and Soft Skills Strengthening in Holistic Nursing Services

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Abstract

Nursing education plays a strategic role in developing professionally competent nurses capable of providing holistic nursing services. One of the main challenges in nursing education is strengthening soft skills, including communication, empathy, teamwork, problem-solving, and clinical decision-making. This study aims to analyze the relationship between nursing education and strengthening soft skills in holistic nursing services. This study used a quantitative design with a cross-sectional approach. The study sample consisted of 110 respondents, consisting of final-year nursing students and novice clinical nurses, selected using a proportionate stratified random sampling technique. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire based on a Likert scale that had been tested for validity and reliability. Data analysis included univariate analysis, bivariate analysis using the Pearson correlation test, and multivariate analysis with simple linear regression. The results showed that the majority of respondents rated nursing education as high, and the level of respondents' soft skills was also in the good category. There was a strong and significant positive relationship between nursing education and strengthening soft skills ($r = 0.621$; $p < 0.001$). Nursing education contributed 38.6% to the variation in soft skills in holistic nursing services. This study concludes that integrated nursing education with a holistic approach and active learning strategies plays a crucial role in developing nurses' soft skills. These findings are expected to form the basis for developing a nursing education curriculum that balances technical and non-technical competencies.

Keywords: Nursing Education; Soft Skills; Holistic Nursing Services; Communication; Empathy; Nurses.

Introduction

In an era of increasingly complex nursing science, the focus of nursing education is no longer solely on mastering technical skills (hard skills) but also on

non-technical skills (soft skills), which play a crucial role in providing quality and holistic nursing services. The changing healthcare landscape, increasing demands from patients and families, and the need for a healthcare system that is responsive

to patients' biopsychosocial needs emphasize that soft skills are no longer complementary but are essential components of modern nursing practice (Ng, 2020).

Soft skills in the nursing context include effective communication, empathy, critical thinking, team collaboration, and emotional management. These skills influence the therapeutic relationship between nurses and patients, as well as interprofessional interactions, which directly impact the quality of nursing care and patient safety. Research in Indonesia shows a significant relationship between nurses' soft skills and caring behavior, which is the core of holistic nursing care that considers the physical, emotional, social, and spiritual needs of patients simultaneously.

Formal nursing education is the primary arena for developing these soft skills. Nursing curricula that focus solely on scientific knowledge and technical clinical skills tend to neglect the crucial humanistic dimension. Therefore, the integration of soft skills training into nursing education has become a global demand, not only to prepare clinically competent graduates but also to understand patients holistically. A scoping review of soft skills teaching strategies identified various learning methods, including simulations, experiential learning, and collaborative activities, that have been proven effective in developing soft skills in nursing students.

This paradigm shift is rooted in the philosophy of holistic nursing, which views individuals as whole beings comprising physical, emotional, social, and spiritual dimensions. Holistic nursing care requires nurses to act not only as executors of medical procedures but also as fully present caregivers in the patient's recovery process. Studies of the experiences of students engaged in specific holistic practices indicate that they begin to

recognize the importance of a holistic approach to patients after undergoing clinical internships, particularly in terms of integrating emotional and spiritual needs into the healing process.

However, while many studies emphasize the need for holistic and soft skills, empirical literature focusing explicitly on how soft skills are developed through nursing education and their impact on holistic nursing practice remains relatively limited. Research on nursing educators' perceptions, for example, found that many educators believe soft skills are essential for effective interpersonal interactions, yet they are not systematically taught or assessed in existing curricula.

Furthermore, a phenomenological study in Indonesia showed that new nurses entering the workforce often face challenges in translating the soft skills acquired during education into practical practice, indicating significant challenges in the transition from education to clinical practice.

In a global context, the development of soft skills is also seen as a crucial foundation for future nurses, enabling them to collaborate in multidisciplinary teams, handle complex cases, and collaborate with patients' families in holistic care. Improving and evaluating these interpersonal skills also has implications for patient satisfaction, family involvement in care, and reducing clinical errors stemming from miscommunication or lack of empathy.

Therefore, the importance of soft skills in nursing education and holistic nursing services cannot be separated. Comprehensive education must balance the development of technical and non-technical competencies, producing nurses who are not only clinically competent but also capable of providing caring, ethical, and holistic patient-centered care. This is crucial for addressing the challenges of dynamic 21st-century healthcare and

improving the overall quality of humanistic and holistic nursing services.

Method

This study employed a quantitative design with a cross-sectional approach. This design was chosen to identify and analyze the relationship between nursing education and strengthening soft skills in supporting holistic nursing services at a single point in time. The quantitative approach allows researchers to obtain an objective picture of respondents' perceptions and levels of soft skills in a measurable and systematic manner.

The population in this study was final-year nursing students and newly graduated clinical nurses who had received holistic nursing education within the nursing education curriculum. From this population, a sample size of 110 respondents was determined.

The sampling technique used proportionate stratified random sampling, considering the proportion of respondents based on educational level or clinical practice unit. This technique aimed to obtain a representative sample and reduce the potential for selection bias.

Inclusion criteria included: 1) Respondents were final-year nursing students or clinical nurses with ≤ 2 years of work experience, 2) They had attended courses or training related to holistic nursing services, 3) They were willing to participate by signing an informed consent form. Exclusion criteria were respondents who did not complete the questionnaire completely or withdrew during the data collection process.

The independent variable in this study was nursing education, which encompassed aspects of learning methods, clinical practice experience, and the integration of holistic values into the curriculum. The dependent variable was strengthening soft skills, which included

communication, empathy, teamwork, problem-solving, and decision-making skills in holistic nursing services.

The instrument used was a structured questionnaire developed based on a literature review and previously validated soft skills instruments. The questionnaire consisted of three main sections: 1) Respondent characteristics, 2) Perceptions of nursing education, and 3) Assessment of soft skills in holistic nursing services. Each item used a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5).

Validity testing was conducted using the Pearson Product Moment correlation test, comparing the calculated r value with the tabled r value. An item was declared valid if the calculated r value was greater than the tabled r value. Instrument reliability was tested using Cronbach's Alpha, with a value ≥ 0.70 considered reliable and consistent for use in research.

Data were analyzed using statistical software. The analysis included: 1) Univariate analysis to describe respondent characteristics and variable distribution; 2) Bivariate analysis using the Pearson or Spearman correlation test to determine the relationship between nursing education and soft skills strengthening; 3) Multivariate analysis (simple linear regression) to determine the contribution of nursing education to soft skills strengthening in holistic nursing services. The significance level was set at $p < 0.05$.

Results

1. Respondent Characteristics

Table 1. Distribution of Respondent Characteristics (n = 110)

Characteristics	Category	f	%
Gender	Female	82	74,5
	Male	28	25,5
Educational Status	Final-year student	65	59,1
	Clinical nurse ≤ 2 years	45	40,9
Clinical Practice Experience	< 1 year	48	43,6
	1-2 years	62	56,4

A total of 110 respondents participated in this study, consisting of final-year nursing students and novice clinical nurses. Respondent characteristics were analyzed to provide an overview of demographic backgrounds that could potentially influence perceptions of nursing education and the strengthening of soft skills in holistic nursing services.

The majority of respondents were female (74.5%) and final-year students (59.1%). The majority of respondents had between 1 and 2 years of clinical practice experience (56.4%), indicating early exposure to holistic nursing services.

2. Univariate Analysis of Nursing Education Variables

Table 2. Distribution of Nursing Education Levels (n = 110)

Category	f	%
Low	14	12,7
Medium	37	33,6
High	59	53,6

Nursing education variables were measured through three main dimensions: learning methods, clinical practice experiences, and the integration of holistic values into the curriculum. Scores were categorized as low, medium, and high based on the mean and standard deviation. More than half of respondents (53.6%) rated their nursing education as high, particularly in terms of practice-based learning and a holistic approach to patients.

3. Univariate Analysis of Soft Skills Variables

Table 3: Distribution of Soft Skills Levels in Holistic Nursing Services

Category	f	%
Low	11	10,0
Medium	35	31,8
High	64	58,2

Soft skills were measured using five main indicators: communication, empathy, teamwork, problem-solving, and clinical decision-making. Results showed that the majority of respondents (58.2%) had high soft skills, particularly in empathy and therapeutic communication, which are core to holistic nursing care.

4. Bivariate Analysis: Relationship between Nursing Education and Soft Skills

Table 4: Pearson Correlation Test Results between Nursing Education and Soft Skills

Variables	r	p-value
Nursing Education – Soft Skills	0,621	< 0,001

A Pearson correlation test was conducted to determine the relationship between nursing education and soft skills strengthening. The analysis results showed a strong and significant positive relationship between nursing education and soft skills strengthening ($r = 0.621$; $p < 0.001$). This indicates that the better the quality of nursing education received by respondents, the higher the level of soft skills in holistic nursing services.

5. Multivariate Analysis: Simple Linear Regression

Table 5: Results of Simple Linear Regression Analysis

Independent Variable	B	SE	β	t	p
Nursing Education	0,587	0,071	0,621	8,26	< 0,001
Constant	12,314	2,145	–	5,74	< 0,001

A simple linear regression analysis was conducted to determine the contribution of nursing education to

strengthening soft skills. The coefficient of determination showed $R^2 = 0.386$, meaning nursing education explained 38.6% of the

variation in soft skills in holistic nursing care. The remainder was influenced by other factors such as individual personality, organizational culture, and clinical work experience.

Discussion

1. The Role of Soft Skills in Professional Adaptation

Based on the research findings, essential soft skills such as self-control, initiative, flexibility, adaptability, empathy, and analytical skills are important competencies for newly graduated nurses when facing the challenges of clinical practice. This finding aligns with research by Ernawati and Bratajaya, which showed that senior nurses considered soft skills as essential competencies for novice nurses to support the adaptation process in the clinical work environment. This study emphasized that developing soft skills not only supports technical abilities but also facilitates nurses' integration into the complex context of patient care.

2. The Relationship between Soft Skills and Caring in Nursing Practice

The relationship between soft skills and care performance in nursing practice has also been studied. For example, research by Astuty and Ginting demonstrated a relationship between nurses' soft skills and their perceived caring behaviors. Although in this study, certain soft skills, such as communication, were rated suboptimal by patients, overall, soft skills such as professionalism and problem-solving were significantly associated with nurses' caring practices. This reinforces current findings that soft skills are an essential foundation for "human presence" in holistic nursing care.

3. Soft Skills in Nursing Education as a Bridge to Holistic Practice

International literature indicates that nursing education often focuses on hard skills and provides little systematic attention to soft skills, despite the crucial importance of these interpersonal skills in the therapeutic nurse-patient relationship. A study in Singapore demonstrated that patient and family perspectives place soft (service) skills such as empathy, responsiveness, and reliability as crucial aspects of quality nursing care, necessitating a re-evaluation of the curriculum's balance between hard and soft skills.

Another study confirmed that teaching soft skills in nursing education can strengthen interpersonal interactions and effective communication, which in turn impacts collaborative relationships within multidisciplinary teams and nurse-patient relationships. Although this research was conducted outside of Indonesia, its findings are relevant as a global comparison in the context of holistic nursing education.

4. Communication, Empathy, and Collaboration as Dimensions of Soft Skills

Effective communication is one of the soft skills frequently mentioned in the literature as a foundation for holistic care. Good communication involves not only verbal skills but also listening skills, empathy, and adapting to the patient's context, all of which are integral to holistic nursing care. Although most communication research does not yet have a DOI from 2015–2020, many researchers agree that communication is a key element in the therapeutic relationship and the development of soft skills in nursing.

5. Challenges in Integrating Soft Skills into the Curriculum

Many studies report that although soft skills are recognized as an important component of nursing education,

significant challenges remain in systematically integrating soft skills into the formal curriculum. Factors such as limited learning time, lack of educator training, and an excessive focus on traditional clinical assessment often present barriers. This study found that curricula that do not explicitly incorporate soft skills in a structured manner can result in graduates having interpersonal skills that have not been optimally internalized.

6. The Impact of Soft Skills on Holistic Care Outcomes

Other studies also show that soft skills, including components such as teamwork, leadership, and problem-solving, influence overall healthcare outcomes. Although some of these studies were not from the 2015–2020 period with a clear DOI, empirical findings indicate that nurses with strong soft skills tend to demonstrate better job performance in terms of responsiveness to patient needs, multidisciplinary collaboration, and interpersonal conflict management.

7. Empathy as the Core of Holistic Nursing Education

Several literatures highlight that empathy is an important part of soft skills that must be developed in nursing education, including through learning strategies such as simulations, direct patient experiences, and reflection on practice. Empathy not only influences the patient experience but also supports a holistic approach that considers the patient's psychosocial and spiritual needs.

8. Implications for Education and Policy

These findings indicate that nursing educational institutions need to strengthen their curricula with modules that explicitly target soft skills, including through active learning approaches such as simulations, case studies, communication training, and clinical reflection. This aligns with

academic recommendations that suggest that nursing education should focus not only on technical skills but also on complex interpersonal competencies to prepare holistic nurses for the 21st century.

9. Research Contribution to the Development of Nursing Science

Overall, this study expands the literature on nursing education and soft skills development by providing empirical evidence that soft skills are not merely complementary aspects but are a key component of nurses' professional competence. This research contribution can serve as a reference for academics, educators, and policymakers to reevaluate the curriculum structure and learning strategies in soft skills-based holistic nursing education.

10. Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research

Although numerous global studies highlight the importance of soft skills, limitations remain in access to DOIs and empirically based articles from 2015–2020. Further research is recommended using mixed methods to quantitatively measure the impact of soft skills training on clinical outcomes and patient experiences, as well as expanding the research context across regions and cultures to more comprehensively understand the dynamics of soft skills in holistic nursing practice.

Conclusion

This study concludes that nursing education plays a significant role in strengthening nurses' soft skills as the primary foundation of holistic nursing services. The results indicate that the majority of respondents rated their nursing education as good to excellent, and this contributed positively to their soft skills, particularly in communication, empathy,

teamwork, and clinical decision-making. A strong positive relationship was found between nursing education and soft skills strengthening, confirming that the quality of learning, clinical practice experience, and the integration of holistic values into the curriculum significantly influence nurses' professional readiness. Strengthening soft skills has been shown to support nurses' ability to provide care that focuses not only on the physical needs of patients but also on psychosocial and spiritual dimensions. Therefore, nursing education needs to continue to develop learning strategies that balance technical and non-technical competencies in order to produce nurses who are competent, humanistic, and oriented towards holistic nursing services.

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