



Unlocking the Potential of Emotion Management and Reflection in Nursing Education – A Narrative Review

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ABSTRACT

Emotional Intelligence (EI) has emerged as a pivotal aspect in the development of healthcare professionals, particularly within the context of nursing education. The foundational premise of Emotional Intelligence lies in the ability to recognize, understand, and regulate one's own emotions, as well as to empathize with and influence the emotions of others. In the nursing profession, where empathetic communication and compassionate care are paramount, the cultivation of Emotional Intelligence becomes imperative. Emotion management within the scope of nursing education entails the acquisition and refinement of skills necessary for healthcare professionals to navigate the emotional complexities inherent in patient care. This involves not only the adept handling of one's emotions but also the ability to respond empathetically to patients and colleagues. Reflection, as a complementary component, serves as a critical pedagogical tool in nursing education. Integrating reflective practices enables nursing students to analyze and comprehend the emotional dimensions of their experiences, facilitating a deeper understanding of the impact of emotions on patient outcomes. Patient-centered care stands as a fundamental principle in nursing, requiring empathy, understanding, and compassion. Nursing students equipped with proficient emotional management skills can deliver care that genuinely prioritizes the emotional well-being of the patient. The ability of nursing professionals to manage emotions effectively and engage in reflective practices becomes not only an educational imperative but a fundamental requisite for ensuring optimal patient care outcomes. This study aims to examine the role of emotional intelligence in nursing education, specifically focusing on the "managing emotions" aspect and evaluating the effectiveness of reflection in enhancing emotional intelligence among nursing students.

Keywords: Emotional Intelligence, Emotion Management, Reflection, Nursing, Nursing Education

1. Introduction

In the dynamic landscape of healthcare, nurses play a pivotal role in delivering quality patient care. Beyond clinical skills and knowledge, nurses must possess strong socio-emotional competencies to navigate the complex and emotionally charged environments they encounter.

Nurses dedicate themselves to addressing the diverse and intricate needs of individuals with skill and empathy despite the demanding nature of their profession. They face various challenges, such as infection risk, physical and verbal assaults, caring for multiple patients with complex needs, engaging in emotional discussions with patients and families, and navigating complex social and ethical dilemmas, depending on their role and work environment. (Flaubert JL, Le Menestrel S, Williams DR, et al., 2021)

Nursing, according to the World Health Organization (WHO), encompasses a multifaceted role that involves the provision of autonomous as well as collaborative care to individuals across the lifespan, including families, communities, and various groups, irrespective of their health status. This role extends to health promotion, disease prevention, and the administration of care to individuals who are afflicted by illness, disability, or nearing the end of life. They are frequently the first to identify health emergencies and operate at the forefront of disease prevention and the delivery of essential primary healthcare services, including activities like health promotion, preventive interventions, treatment, and rehabilitation. Nurses, in many countries, constitute a substantial portion of the healthcare workforce, and they wield significant influence in shaping the organization and execution of healthcare initiatives. This influence extends from direct patient care at the frontlines to managerial roles. In many instances, nurses represent the first and sometimes the sole healthcare professionals with whom patients come into contact, underscoring the critical importance of the quality of their initial assessments and subsequent care in achieving favorable health outcomes. (World Health Organization, WHO)

Nursing care is inherently holistic, meaning it takes into account the physical, psychological, emotional, and social aspects of patients.

One nursing theory that is well suited for socio-emotional skills development is the Theory of Human Caring, developed by Dr. Jean Watson. The Theory of Human Caring recognizes the patients' socio-emotional needs and highlights the nurse's role in addressing those needs. It encourages nurses to practice empathy, compassion, and active listening to establish a therapeutic connection with the patient. By acknowledging the patient's emotions, beliefs, and values, nurses can foster trust and create a safe space for emotional expression and personal growth. (Petiprin, A., 2023)

The theory also emphasizes the importance of promoting self-care and self-awareness in both nurses and patients. Nurses are encouraged to cultivate their own personal and professional growth, allowing them to be more present and attentive to the needs of their patients. By practicing self-care, nurses can model healthy socio-emotional behaviors and support patients in their own self-care practices. It is essential to recognize that nurses have diverse roles, as they are responsible for addressing both the physical health and emotional well-being of their patients. This entails offering emotional support, cultivating therapeutic connections, and fostering holistic well-being. Consequently, nursing education should ensure that future nurses acquire the essential socio-emotional skills required to fulfill these intricate responsibilities.

Nursing education in the Philippines, much like in other countries, is marked by its demanding nature, characterized by rigorous coursework, extensive clinical rotations, and long hours of study. The curriculum is a labyrinth of anatomy and physiology, microbiology, pharmacology, medical-surgical nursing, maternal and child nursing, and more. The pressure to excel is ever-present, as a strong academic foundation is essential to success.

Clinical rotations, as we call them in the Philippines, are like a melting pot where nursing students grow into professional nurses. Hospitals and healthcare institutions assume the role of training grounds, wherein they confront the unvarnished truths of illness, human suffering, and vulnerability. Aspiring nurses bear witness to a wide array of human experiences, from the elation of ushering new life into the world to the heart-wrenching moments of witnessing life's inevitable departure. This experiential journey represents a rite of passage that not only imparts practical skills but also nurtures the development of resilience and empathy, traits fundamental to their future roles as healthcare professionals.

During clinical rotations, nursing students gain hands-on exposure to actual patient care, allowing them to put their theoretical knowledge into practice. These experiences, which involve confronting human suffering and vulnerability, play a pivotal role in nurturing a deep sense of empathy and compassion among nursing students. These qualities are valuable for delivering patient-centered care.

Furthermore, clinical rotations encourage students to hone their critical thinking abilities, make swift decisions, and adapt to rapidly changing circumstances. This aspect of their training significantly contributes to their growth as competent and adaptable healthcare providers, preparing them for the multifaceted nature of the nursing profession.

Emotional Intelligence (EI) is a subject of increasing interest in the realm of nursing education and practice. Research on EI in nursing has particularly developed recently, highlighting the importance of including this concept in the existing training. (Manon Dugué, Olivier Sirost, Fabrice Dosseville, 2023)

Emotional intelligence, a central facet of SEL, encompasses the ability to recognize and manage one's own emotions, as well as the capacity to understand and influence the emotions of others. These competencies are particularly valuable in healthcare settings where students often encounter patients and families experiencing high levels of stress, anxiety, and vulnerability. Nursing students with strong emotional intelligence can provide empathetic care, build rapport, and effectively address patient needs, leading to improved patient outcomes.

The study conducted by Dou S, Han C, Li C, Liu X, Gan W in 2022 presented several noteworthy findings of particular importance in the field of nursing education:

- a. "Managing emotions" branch has the greatest impact on the clinical ability;
- b. Reflection is increasingly being advocated as a strategy for developing EI; and

Hence, the primary objective of this study is to examine the role of emotional intelligence in nursing education, with a particular focus on the "managing emotions" aspect of emotional intelligence and the effectiveness of using reflection as a method for enhancing emotional intelligence among nursing students. It sought to address the following research questions:

- a. What is the extent of the impact of the "Managing emotions" branch on clinical ability in nursing students?
- b. How effective is the strategy of reflection in developing emotional intelligence among nursing students?

2. Method

The main aim of this study is to investigate the role of emotional intelligence in nursing education, specifically concentrating on the "managing emotions" dimension of emotional intelligence and evaluating the effectiveness of reflection as a tool for improving emotional intelligence in nursing students.

To accomplish this, a comprehensive review of academic literature was conducted. This review involved searching reputable databases, including PubMed, ResearchGate, and ScienceDirect, among others. The search process was guided by specific keywords such as "Emotional Intelligence", "Socio-Emotional Skills", "Emotion Management", "Reflection", "Nursing", and "Nursing Education".

3. Results and Discussion

'Managing Emotions': Why is it Important in Nursing Education?

In their 2022 study, Dou and colleagues emphasized the significance of the "managing emotions" aspect of Emotional Intelligence (EI) and its direct impact on the clinical abilities of nursing interns. They pointed out that this particular aspect involves effectively utilizing emotions, which essentially

entails integrating the other three branches of EI - perceiving emotions, facilitating thought, and understanding emotions. The authors further stressed that every nursing action is accompanied by associated emotions. Therefore, it is of paramount importance for nursing students to proficiently manage both their own emotions and those of their patients to effectively attain their nursing objectives.

In an article from Winona State University on Emotional Management, the concept entails the conscious awareness and effective regulation of one's emotions. This skill is instrumental in governing daily behavior and successfully navigating interpersonal relationships and challenging circumstances. The article emphasizes that Emotional Management commences with the capability to accurately perceive, label, and comprehend emotions, encompassing both positive and uncomfortable or "negative" emotions. Once individuals possess a clear awareness and understanding of their emotions, the subsequent step involves taking proactive measures to manage them for optimal outcomes. This necessitates maintaining adaptability and controlling emotional responses to various situations and interactions.

In a Noba module authored by Brackett, M., et al. (2023), the authors reference the works of Gross in 1998, who defines Emotion Management as the ability to embrace a broad spectrum of emotions. This involves recognizing the significance of experiencing specific emotions in certain contexts and understanding the most effective short- and long-term strategies for regulating emotions.

The concept of "managing emotions" in nursing education involves a complex interplay between recognizing one's emotions, not suppressing them, and reassessing their importance in the context of maintaining self-composure. In nursing practice, emotions naturally arise in response to various situations. These emotions can range from empathy and compassion to stress and frustration. However, managing emotions does not imply avoiding or denying these emotional responses. Instead, it suggests acknowledging and understanding them.

In a literature review conducted by Dugué, M. et al. in 2023, a consistent correlation emerged between Emotional Intelligence (EI) and enhanced productivity and clinical competence. Furthermore, the review highlighted the association between EI and academic achievement, revealing that students who excel in emotional self-regulation tend to perform better academically, as evidenced by studies such as those conducted by Beauvais, et al. (2014), Codier & Odell (2014), Fernandez, et al. (2012), Foster, et al. (2017), Por et al. (2011), Sharon & Grinberg (2018), and Shanta & Gargiulo (2014).

Within the same literature review by Dugué, M., and colleagues, Emotional Intelligence (EI) plays a pivotal role in assisting nursing students in effectively addressing challenges encountered in clinical practice, as underscored by the research conducted by Foster and McCloughen in 2020, as well as the study by Li et al. in 2015. This phenomenon leads to an enhanced capacity among students to concentrate on problem-solving and express their emotions openly, thereby facilitating more proficient emotional regulation, as validated by findings in the studies of Alconero-Camarero, et al. in 2018, and Kim and Shin in 2021.

It was mentioned in the article by Dou et al. (2022) that the operational definition of "managing emotions", according to Mayer, is avoiding emotions and re-evaluating value for the sake of self-calmness. The ability to avoid succumbing to emotional reactions and instead re-evaluate one's values in pursuit of self-calmness holds a central place in the emotional toolkit of students. Hence, "Managing Emotions", from the researcher's perspective as a nurse, educator, and a student before, is crucial within the nursing practice.

Nursing is undoubtedly a profession filled with heightened emotional intensity. During nursing clinical rotations, nursing students often encounter patients who are in pain, suffering, or in distress. Furthermore, they must navigate intricate interpersonal relationships with patients, families, and colleagues, all of which can generate heightened emotional states.

An additional defining aspect of the nursing profession involves consistent exposure to stress-inducing situations. Nursing students, during clinical rotations, regularly encounter life-and-death scenarios, handle emergencies, and navigate challenging health crises, such as those seen during the COVID-19 pandemic. Studies by Aradilla-Herrero et al. in 2013 and Tomás-Sábado, J. in 2014 have indicated that students with lower Emotional Intelligence (EI) tend to experience heightened anxiety when faced with situations like death, anxiety, or other stressors. Therefore, the cultivation of emotional management skills serves as a protective mechanism, acting as a shield against the overwhelming emotional impact of such events.

Patient-centered care stands as a fundamental principle in nursing, requiring empathy, understanding, and compassion. Nursing students equipped with proficient emotional management skills can deliver care that genuinely prioritizes the emotional well-being of the patient. The improvement of students' emotional competencies translates to enhanced patient care practices. When students effectively manage and remain attuned to both their own emotions and those of their patients, the provision of patient care becomes more personalized, ethical, and professional. This improvement in clinical performance is evident in the studies conducted by Culha & Acaroglu (2018) and Marvos & Hale (2015). Through the reevaluation of one's values and reactions, a deeper emotional connection with patients is established, allowing for a sensitive and empathetic response to their emotional needs. Nightingale, et al. (2018) further emphasized that when nurses comprehend, identify, and effectively manage their own and their patients' emotions, overall satisfaction with the patient experience and care provided is significantly enhanced.

The healthcare environment, teeming with dynamic relationships and high-stake decisions, frequently gives rise to conflicts. Effectively managing his/her own emotions equips nursing students with the tools to handle these conflicts proficiently. By avoiding impulsive emotional reactions and recalibrating their values for the sake of self-calmness, one can engage in constructive and empathetic communication, which is essential for resolving conflicts, whether they occur among colleagues or in interactions with patients and their families. The level of Emotional Intelligence (EI) also has an influence on the students' ability in conflict management, particularly in their interactions with their supervisors. This influence has been observed in research studies such as Chan, et al. in 2014 and McCloughen and Foster in 2018. The works of Chan et al. in 2014 and McCloughen and Foster in 2018 posit that students are inclined to incorporate emotionally intelligent behaviors such as reflection and reframing, compromise, calm, discomfort control, and appropriate emotional expression during conflict management. Several studies likewise demonstrate a positive correlation between Emotional Intelligence (EI) and

effective conflict management skills with supervisors, improved clinical communication, and enhanced relationships with patients and their families (Chan et al., 2014; Giulia, V., et al., 2019; Hajibabae et al., 2018; Kong et al., 2016; McCloughen & Foster, 2018; Kaya H., et al., 2014).

In the intricate world of nursing practice, where emotions run high, the significance of "Managing Emotions" in the EI paradigm cannot be overstated. This facet of EI, entailing the avoidance of emotional impulsivity and the reevaluation of values for self-calmness, is indispensable for students in providing high-quality, patient-centered care, fostering effective communication and conflict resolution, and maintaining their own emotional well-being.

The above findings resonate with the core essence of nursing practice, where the effective management of emotions is essential. Nursing students are tasked with the emotional well-being of their patients, and self-regulation is central to providing compassionate, patient-centered care.

The Role of Reflection in EI Development

One of the most compelling aspects of the study by Dou and colleagues (2022) is its endorsement of reflection as a potent strategy for developing EI. Reflection is increasingly being advocated in nursing as a means to nurture self-awareness and emotional growth. It offers students the opportunity to examine their emotions, interactions, and responses to various clinical situations, fostering a deep understanding of their own emotional landscape.

Perkins, N. A., & Schmid, A. A. (2019) emphasize the importance of self-reflection as a means to assess one's strengths and areas for improvement, and to identify emotional responses. This process not only has the potential to enhance personal performance but also fosters enduring self-awareness. Moreover, their work highlights the critical role of recognizing emotional responses as a key facet of self-reflection, particularly in understanding how one's emotions influence others. The positive outcomes of such reflective practices are not limited to self-awareness; they extend to the facilitation of personal accountability. Consequently, they concluded that the implementation of self-reflection journals represents a valuable approach for augmenting self-awareness and enhancing overall emotional intelligence (EI) competencies.

According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), metacognition/self-reflection has been found to be one of the most fundamental skills for lifelong learning, along with the ability to adjust to changing requirements and settings.

Lambert (2021) and Major (2019) underscore the crucial role of self-awareness and reflection in the cultivation of emotional intelligence (EI). Both authors emphasize that these elements are instrumental in the development of EI among nurses. It was also mentioned that achieving self-awareness and fostering reflection can be attained through a diverse range of methods, both formal and informal, which include processes such as revalidation, clinical supervision, mentoring, personal introspection, and the exchange of experiences with colleagues or friends.

In her 2022 article, Barchard F. underscores the discernible benefits associated with the incorporation of reflective practices into nursing. Specifically, she posits that such integration facilitates the acquisition of valuable insights from clinical events, empowering nurses to dynamically adapt and augment their skill sets.

Jootun and McGarry (2014) emphasized the integration of reflection as an invaluable tool in nursing education, facilitating the learning process for nursing students. They highlighted the significance of students engaging in experiential learning and subsequent reflection, enabling them to critically evaluate the efficacy of their performances by discerning both positive and negative aspects. The study posited that reflection serves as a catalyst for nurses to transition from a confined awareness, often rooted in unquestioned knowledge derived from past experiences and theory, towards a more comprehensive understanding of novel situations. This transformative process is facilitated through the exploration of pertinent scientific and artistic dimensions essential to professional practice. Such exploration, as highlighted in the study, fosters deep learning and comprehension of clinical scenarios, enabling nurses to reconsider and refine their future nursing interventions, ultimately contributing to enhanced patient outcomes. Additionally, the study emphasized that through reflective practices, nurses can systematically review their professional conduct, thereby fortifying both their personal and professional skills and knowledge. This deliberate self-assessment is instrumental in ensuring the sustained capacity of nurses to deliver high-quality care.

Patel KM, and Metersky K. (2021) asserted that reflective practice, identified as a cognitive skill, necessitates deliberate engagement to assess a situation while being mindful of one's own beliefs, values, and professional practices. This cognitive aptitude empowers nurses to derive insights from their experiences and apply these learnings to enhance patient care outcomes. Moreover, the authors emphasized that reflective practice contributes significantly to the development of knowledge within the nursing domain.

Reflective practice is an essential cognitive skill for nursing students, demanding a deliberate and conscious effort to analyze situations while considering their own beliefs, values, and emerging clinical practices. This skill enables nursing students to extract valuable insights from their experiences and apply these lessons to enhance their future patient care approaches. Through reflective practice, nursing students can identify areas for improvement in their skills and develop a deeper understanding of the complexities of healthcare delivery. This process not only contributes to personal and professional growth but also fosters a culture of continuous learning within the nursing student community. Ultimately, reflective practice empowers nursing students to evolve into competent and compassionate healthcare professionals, laying the foundation for a lifelong commitment to improving patient outcomes and advancing nursing knowledge.

Parwanda G. (2023) noted that in nursing education, the application of reflection serves several purposes. Firstly, it aids in elevating self-awareness, leading to a heightened understanding of how past experiences can impact the delivery of care. Secondly, it contributes to the development of nursing students' intellectual capacities, enabling them to conceptualize knowledge effectively for improved assessment of client needs. Lastly, reflection facilitates the analysis of one's self, values, core beliefs, and attitudes within the context of nursing practice.

Parwanda G. (2023) additionally stated that participation in reflective practice contributes to the enhancement of nursing care quality, promotes personal and professional development, and diminishes the disparity between theoretical knowledge and practical application.

Reflection is a vital aspect of personal and professional growth, and its potential to bring about changes in individual practice and leadership is paramount. These transformations are instrumental in augmenting the emotional intelligence of students, which, in turn, significantly enhances their ability to deliver high-quality patient care and contribute meaningfully to the healthcare landscape.

In its simplest forms, reflection can be carried out through various approaches, such as:

- a. **Journaling:** Keeping a reflective journal where students jot down their thoughts, experiences, and emotions in response to clinical encounters. This process provides an opportunity to revisit and analyze these entries over time.
- b. **Mentorship and Peer Discussions:** Engaging in discussions with mentors or peers, where experiences and emotions are shared and explored in a supportive and constructive environment.
- c. **Self-Questioning:** Regularly asking oneself questions about specific clinical scenarios and personal responses. Questions like, "How did I handle that situation?" or "What could I have done differently?" prompt introspection.
- d. **Mindfulness and Meditation:** Engaging in mindfulness practices and meditation to connect with one's emotions, thoughts, and reactions, fostering self-awareness.

These simple reflective practices empower students to become more synchronized with their emotions, thought processes, and reactions in the clinical environment. Reflection provides a structured means for students to dissect their emotional experiences, facilitating the development of self-awareness, emotional regulation, and empathy. Integrating reflection into the learning process can be a transformative step toward enhancing emotional intelligence and, by extension, clinical competence.

4. Conclusion

In the complex field of nursing, the importance of "Managing Emotions" within the Emotional Intelligence (EI) paradigm is crucial. This facet involves avoiding emotional impulsivity and reevaluating values for self-calmness, proving indispensable for nursing students in delivering patient-centered care, fostering effective communication, and preserving their emotional well-being. This aligns with the core essence of nursing, where adept emotion management is vital. Additionally, reflection serves as a key tool for personal and professional growth, facilitating emotional intelligence development. By providing a structured means for students to dissect their emotional experiences, reflection contributes to the enhancement of self-awareness, emotional regulation, and empathy. Integrating reflection into the learning process is thus transformative for emotional intelligence and clinical competence, emphasizing its importance in shaping proficient and compassionate nursing professionals.

There is also a necessity for comprehensive educational strategies, targeted interventions, reflective practices, and the integration of EI courses to foster the development of emotionally intelligent and clinically competent nursing professionals. As the nursing field evolves, acknowledging the emotional dimension of care becomes crucial. Educators and institutions must recognize EI's potential to reshape the future of nursing, ensuring graduates possess not only clinical skills but also emotional adeptness for delivering compassionate, patient-centered care amid evolving healthcare challenges.

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Conflict of Interest

The author has no conflict of interest to declare.

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