



**DEFINITION OF THE LEADERSHIP FORMATION PROCESS
FOR UNDERGRADUATE NURSING STUDENTS**

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ABSTRACT

Leadership is an essential capability that nurses must develop to provide safe, collaborative, and ethically grounded care. Nonetheless, undergraduate nursing students often differ in how they perceive the developmental process of leadership, which may influence their preparedness to navigate future professional challenges. This study seeks to uncover how nursing students interpret their journey in developing leadership within the academic and clinical learning environment. Using an 8-participant phenomenological design, researchers conducted in-depth interviews with ten students actively engaged in both academic and organizational roles. Data were examined using Colaizzi's analytical steps to identify core themes that reflect participants' lived experiences in cultivating leadership. The analysis revealed four central themes: (1) leadership as a continuous learning experience, (2) the role of self-reflection and professional accountability, (3) social interaction and organizational participation as avenues for leadership growth, and (4) moral and ethical foundations as pillars of leadership integrity in nursing. The findings indicate that leadership development among nursing students is an evolving and multifaceted process shaped by hands-on experience, reflective thinking, and internalized ethical values. Students view leadership not merely as directing others but as an ongoing self-development process characterized by professionalism, empathy, and social responsibility. Leadership growth is layered, progressive, and intertwined with educational experiences, reflective practices, and engagement in ethically oriented organizations, forming future nurses with strong, reflective, and humanistic leadership qualities.

Keywords: leadership; nursing education; nursing students; phenomenology; professionalism

How to Cite (in APA Style)

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INTRODUCTION

Leadership is an essential competency that every nurse must possess in order to be able to provide effective, safe, and collaborative nursing care. A nurse with good leadership skills is not only able to make appropriate clinical decisions but also plays a role in coordinating the team and managing healthcare professionally. (Nikpour et al., 2022). In the context of nursing education, undergraduate programs have a strategic role in instilling values, attitudes, and leadership skills through academic learning processes, clinical practice, and students' active participation in organizational activities. (Saab et al., 2021). The learning process shows that leadership is not only conceptual, but also a real experience that contributes to the formation of students' character and professionalism as future nursing leaders. (Teixeira et al., 2023a).

Although leadership is an important focus in nursing education, research examining how students understand and interpret the leadership formation process is still limited. (Reime et al., 2022). Most research in Indonesia tends to focus on evaluating the effectiveness of leadership learning methods, such as simulation, management training, and mentoring, while studies that explore students' subjective experiences are still rarely conducted. (Education, 2021). As a result, the understanding of how students internalize leadership values and apply them in academic contexts as well as clinical practice, has not been fully revealed. Thus, although students acquire leadership theory in college, the reflective process in interpreting leadership as a self-formation experience has not been

widely explored. 2023).

The urgency of this research lies in the need to strengthen the formation of true leadership character, not just technical skills. (Cristina et al., 2020). A comprehensive insight into students' experiences is expected to help educational institutions design learning strategies that are more reflective, contextual, and relevant to the world of work of nursing professionals.

The novelty of this research lies in focusing on students' subjective interpretation of the leadership formation process, which is different from previous research that focused more on the evaluation of teaching methods. (Islam et al., 2021). Through a phenomenological approach, this study seeks to explore in depth students' experiences of leadership formation, so as to offer a conceptual contribution to enhancing nursing leadership education strategies derived from real-life experiences.

Based on this description, the research question asked is: "How do undergraduate nursing students interpret the process of leadership formation in the context of academic and nursing practice?" The purpose of this research is to comprehensively understand the meaning of students to the leadership formation process and provide a conceptual basis for the development of nursing education strategies that are oriented to experience and professional leadership values.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a phenomenological design to deeply understand the experiences of undergraduate nursing students in the process of leadership formation through learning activities and organizational involvement. (Kaldheim et al., 2023). 8 participants were selected using purposive sampling techniques, involving ten final year students who were active in academic activities and student organizations. This selection aims to obtain relevant and meaningful data from individuals who have real experience related to leadership development. (Krishnaveni et al., 2021). Data was collected through in-depth interviews using open-ended questions to explore students' perceptions, reflections, and meanings about the leadership formation process. Each interview is recorded and transcribed verbatim to maintain the accuracy of the information and the integrity of meaning. (Militao et al., 2022).

The analysis was carried out using the Colaizzi phenomenological method, which includes several stages: (1) Reading the entire transcript to get a thorough understanding. (2). Identify meaningful statements from the participants' narratives. (3) Grouping these meanings into main themes. (4). Compile a comprehensive description of the essence of the participant's experience. (5). Conduct member checks to validate the translation results with participants. The validity of the data is strengthened through triangulation of sources and field records, so that the results of the analysis reflect the authentic experiences of students and increase the credibility of the research findings. This approach allows for a deep understanding of the subjective meaning and reflective experiences of students in shaping their leadership character. (Busebaia & John, 2020).

RESULT

The Meaning of the Leadership Formation Process in Undergraduate Nursing Students

The results of the study show that undergraduate nursing students interpret the leadership formation process as a continuous learning journey, involving academic experience, clinical practice, social interaction, and professional, moral, and ethical values. Based on the results of in-depth interviews with ten participants, four main themes were found that describe the meaning of their leadership.

Theme 1: Leadership as a Learning Experience Process

Students understand leadership as a skill that develops through real-life experiences in academic contexts as well as clinical practice. (Alilyyani et al., 2024). This process demands decision-making, responsibility, and teamwork. One of the participants said, 3. "*I learned to lead when I had to divide tasks in a nursing practice group,*" while another added, 5. "*Leadership emerges from*

direct experience, not just theory." Thus, leadership is understood as a dynamic process formed through practical learning, reflection, and adaptation to complex situations in the field.

Theme 2: Self-Reflection and Professional Responsibility

Self-reflection emerged as an important aspect in leadership formation. Students consider that leadership is not only about managing others, but also managing oneself responsibly. Reflection helps them recognize strengths, weaknesses, and ethical values in professional practice. (Matshaka, 2021). One participant said, 6 *"After practice, I always assess what I've done and what needs to be improved,"* while another emphasized, 8. *"Leadership starts with self-awareness and responsibility for our actions."* This process of reflection strengthens professional awareness and fosters an ethical foundation essential to nursing leadership.

Theme 3: Social Interaction and Organizational Activities as a Means of Development Leadership

Students also interpret that social interaction and involvement in organizations are important means of building leadership skills. Organizational experience allows them to learn to manage conflicts, coordinate, and communicate effectively. One of the participants revealed, 1 *"Being the chairman of the committee made me learn to manage teams and solve problems,"* while another stated, 3. *"Interacting with friends who disagree teaches patience and diplomacy."* Thus, social and organizational activities help students develop leadership that is collaborative, adaptive, and based on real experiences.

Theme 4: Moral and Ethical Values as Foundations of Nursing Leadership

The final stage in the leadership formation process is marked by the appreciation of moral values and professional ethics. (Honkavuo, 2021). Students emphasized that leadership in nursing must be based on honesty, empathy, responsibility, and example. One participant said, 4 *"A good leader must be exemplary and honest,"* and another added, 7 *"Ethics are the basis of the decisions I make, both academically and practically."* Moral and ethical values are the foundation of nursing leadership integrity, ensuring every decision is in favor of patients, teams, and communities.

Definition of the Formation Process Leadership in Nursing Students Undergraduate

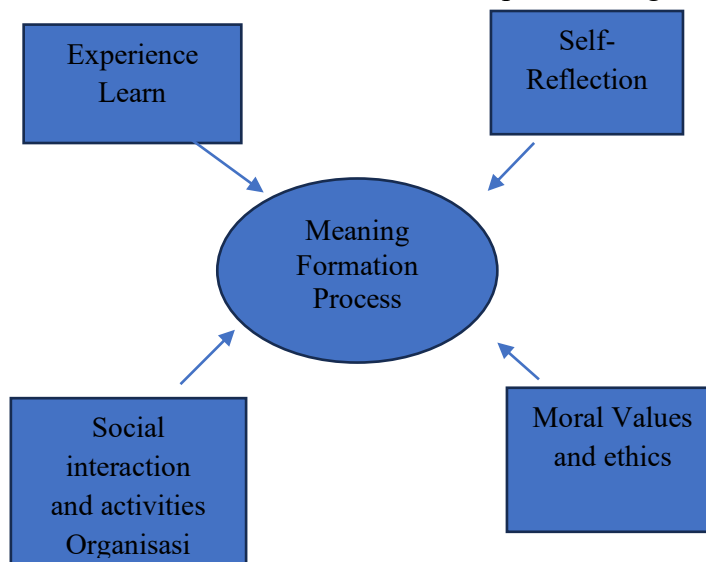


Figure 1. Thematic Model of the Student Leadership Formation Process Nursing

This image shows four main themes in the formation of nursing student leadership. Learning experiences serve as the basis for the formation of practical skills, self-reflection strengthens professional awareness, social interaction and organizational activities develop collaborative skills, while moral and ethical values are the foundation of leadership integrity. These four themes are synergetically interconnected and form a holistic process in nursing leadership development.

DISCUSSION

This study emphasizes that the formation of leadership in undergraduate nursing students is a dynamic and sustainable process formed through experience, reflection, social interaction, and internalization of professional ethical values. The four main themes of learning experience, self-reflection, social engagement, and moral values illustrate that leadership does not arise instantly, but rather evolves from interactions between individuals and a supportive educational environment. (Zhang et al., 2022).

1. Leadership as a Learning Experience Process

Students interpret leadership as a skill that develops through hands-on experience in clinical practice and academic activities. Experience in real-life situations encourages students to learn to make decisions, manage teams, and adapt to complex conditions. These findings support the theory of *experiential learning*, where effective learning occurs through a cycle of concrete experience, reflection, and application. Research (Lockertsen et al., 2023) as well as local studies by (Klinik et al., 2021) show that practical experience accelerates the formation of reflective and adaptive professional leadership. Thus, field learning experiences become an important foundation in developing resilient and contextual nursing leadership.

2. Self-Reflection and Professional Responsibility

Self-reflection plays an important role in strengthening students' professional awareness. Through reflection, they can evaluate the actions and decisions that have been made, understand their weaknesses, and improve themselves. (Jeong et al., 2021). This approach is in line with *reflective practice*, which emphasizes that the improvement of professionalism occurs through a critical analysis of experience. (Durocher & Caxaj, 2022). Reflection also supports the development of *critical thinking* and empathy, two key pillars of human values-based leadership. (Karlsholm et al., 2024). Local research confirms that structured reflection helps students internalize ethical values in clinical practice. Thus, reflection becomes a bridge between leadership theory and value-based application.

3. Social Interaction and Organizational Activities as a Means of Forming Leadership.

Social interaction and organizational activities provide a real space for students to practice leadership. Through organizational activities, they learn to manage conflicts, manage time, communicate effectively, and work across backgrounds. These findings are in line with Bandura's social theory that leadership is formed through a process of observation, modeling, and social experience (Langegård et al., 2021). Research (Sari et al., 2023) Supports that organizational involvement increases students' confidence, responsibility, and interpersonal skills. This activity also fosters *transformational leadership*, which emphasizes moral influence and collective vision. (Hai et al., 2021). Therefore, the integration of organizational activities in the nursing curriculum is a strategic part of building leadership competencies holistically.

4. Moral and Ethical Values as Foundations of Nursing Leadership

Moral values and ethics are the main pillars of nursing leadership practice. Students understand that leadership is not just about power, but example, honesty, and empathy. (Kim & Sim, 2020). These findings support ethical *leadership theories* that emphasize value-based leadership and moral responsibility. (Huang et al., 2021). These values guide students in making professional decisions and facing ethical dilemmas. (Ramjan et al., 2024). Thus, the formation of nursing leadership must be integrated with character education, ethical reflection, and professional guidance.

Implication

The findings of this study confirm the need for a nursing curriculum that places leadership development as a core component through experiential learning, critical reflection, and organizational participation. Lecturers and clinical supervisors are expected to act as role models

and facilitators of ethical learning so that nursing graduates are able to become professional leaders who are humanistic, adaptive, and service-oriented.

CONCLUSION

The process of forming leadership in nursing students is a continuous journey built through learning experiences, self-reflection, social interaction, and appreciation of moral values and professional ethics. The four main themes found in learning experience, self-reflection, social interaction, and moral values show that leadership grows from the process of internalizing real values and practices, rather than just a formal position. Leadership in the context of nursing is reflected through empathy, initiative, responsibility, and a commitment to professionalism and humanity.

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