



STUDENT EXPERIENCE IN DEVELOPING CLINICAL ABILITIES THROUGH NURSING EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

Clinical capability development is a crucial component of nursing education, enabling the production of competent and ethical nurses. Clinical education emphasizes not only technical skills but also the formation of professionalism, soft skills, and moral values. This study aims to understand the experience of nursing students in developing clinical abilities through the clinical education process. The study employed a qualitative phenomenological approach with 12 final-semester nursing students who were purposively selected. Data was collected through in-depth interviews and was analyzed thematically. The analysis involves identifying units of meaning, structuring themes and subthemes, and verifying these interpretations with participants to ensure their accuracy. The findings show four main themes: (1) clinical readiness and application of theory, students experience initial challenges in applying theory to real practice; (2) mentoring and support, which improves technical skills and confidence; (3) self-reflection and self-learning, which strengthens the understanding of self-improvement practices and strategies; (4) development of soft skills and professionalism, including effective communication, teamwork, and the application of professional ethics. The interaction between practical experience, guidance, reflection, and professional development forms a holistic and continuous clinical learning process. Clinical education provides a well-rounded experience to shape students' technical abilities, soft skills, and professionalism so that they are prepared to become competent and responsible nurses.

Keywords: clinical ability; clinical practice; nursing education; professionalism; self-reflection

How to Cite (in APA Style)

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INTRODUCTION

The development of clinical abilities is a key element in nursing education because it determines the readiness of students to enter the world of practice as professionals. Various studies confirm that clinical experiences provide opportunities for students to integrate theory with real practice through a process of observation, independent action, and guidance from the nurse supervisor (Berhe & Gebretensaye, 2021; Negesso et al., 2022). Direct interaction with patients allows students to acquire technical and non-technical skills such as communication, decision-making, problem-solving, and emotion management (Luukkonen et al., 2023). In addition, clinical experience also builds confidence and improves students' critical thinking skills (Gillan & Johnston, 2024). Thus, clinical learning is a crucial phase in the educational process that plays a major role in the quality of prospective nurses (Berhe & Gebretensaye, 2021).

However, although important, there is still a knowledge gap related to how students interpret clinical experience personally. (Zamanzadeh et al., 2024). Much of Indonesian research focuses on the effectiveness of teaching methods, but less explores how students adapt to clinical pressures, emotional challenges, and interprofessional interactions during practice. (Klinik et al., 2021; Yulistika, 2022). Research has also not explored much how the clinical environment, organizational culture, and guidance model affect the development of their abilities. (Luukkonen et al., 2023). This shortcoming makes it difficult for educational institutions to design an experiential learning approach that truly meets the needs of students. (Benamer et al., 2023). Therefore, research is

needed that investigates students' subjective experiences in the process of developing clinical abilities in more depth. This research is important because understanding students' real experiences in the field can be the basis for developing more effective and humane teaching strategies. Using a phenomenological approach, this research offers novelty through the exploration of the meaning that students give to their clinical learning process. This research not only aims to describe the student experience but also to identify the factors that encourage or hinder the development of clinical capabilities.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a phenomenological design to understand the experience of nursing students in developing clinical abilities in depth. This approach was chosen because it allows researchers to explore the subjective meanings that students give to their clinical practice and learning experiences. (Grønning et al., 2022). Participants consisted of 12 final level nursing students from [name institution], selected through purposive sampling so that all participants had hands-on experience in clinical practice and were able to provide rich reflections on their competency development (Grønning et al., 2022). Data were collected through in-depth interviews with open-ended questions, participatory observations, and reflective notes to gain a comprehensive understanding of the students' clinical experience. (Cantillon et al., 2021). The analysis was carried out using a phenomenological thematic approach, by reading transcripts repeatedly, identifying units of meaning, developing themes, and conducting member checking to ensure that interpretations were aligned with the participants' experiences. The validity of the data is strengthened through source triangulation, verification of findings with participants, and systematic recording of the research process (audit trail) (Byermoen et al., 2022). The ethical aspect is maintained through informed consent, confidentiality of identity, and the freedom of participants to terminate involvement at any time without risk or consequences.

RESULT

Students' Experience in Developing Clinical Abilities through Nursing Education

The findings of this study illustrate that nursing students understand clinical practice experience as a series of learning processes that continue to develop. The experience includes the application of theory in a real environment, support from the clinical supervisor, the process of self-reflection, and the formation of professionalism. Based on in-depth interviews with twelve participants, four main themes were generated that describe how students develop clinical abilities during nursing education.

Theme 1: Clinical Readiness and Theoretical Implementation

Students explained that applying theory to clinical situations is an initial challenge, especially when first encountering patients and field conditions. (Vasli & Asadiparvar-Masouleh, 2024). They realize that understanding theory alone is not enough, so hands-on practice and repetition are essential to improve skills and confidence. Quote (P) of the participant:

P1: *"I feel that the theory studied is different from the patient's condition in the hospital, so at first I was confused."*

P4: *"Sometimes I'm not sure how to implement the procedure correctly."*

P3: *"My first experience in the clinic made me realize that there is still a lot to be done. learned."*

Thus, clinical practice helps students hone their readiness for real-world situations while strengthening their ability to bridge theory and practice.

Theme 2: Mentor Guidance and Support

After experiencing initial difficulties in applying the theory, students emphasized the importance of the role of the supervisor in helping them understand clinical practice. (Finstad et al., 2022).

Clinical supervisors and senior nurses not only provide technical direction but also help reduce anxiety, increase confidence, and provide examples of proper working practices. Participant quotes:
 P7: "My mentor always accompanies me, provides corrections, and makes me more confident."
 P8: "Without guidance, I felt afraid of making a mistake while performing the procedure."
 P10: "Senior nurses provide tips that make the clinical learning process easier."
 With the support of mentors, students have a stronger foundation to continue the self-evaluation process and improve their understanding of clinical practice.

Theme 3: Self-Reflection and Self-Learning

Continuing from the experience of receiving guidance, students stated that self-reflection is very helpful in improving performance and deepening understanding of practice. (Matshaka, 2021). Through reflection, students evaluate their experiences, identify areas that work and need improvement, and conduct additional learning independently. Participant quotes:
 P9: "At the end of practice, I write a reflection note about what worked and what needed to be improved."
 P2: "I am looking for additional references to understand the procedure that I have not mastered."
 P5: "Reflection helps me learn from my own experiences and those of friends."
 Thus, self-reflection is an important part of strengthening clinical abilities, as well as preparing students to develop soft skills and professional competencies.

Theme 4: Soft Skills Development and Professionalism

At a further stage, students emphasized that clinical practice also supports the formation of soft skills and professional competencies. (Pang et al., 2019). They learn how to communicate effectively, establish teamwork, and apply the principles of nursing ethics in every action. Participant quotes:
 P10: "I learned how to talk to patients politely and patiently."
 P11: "Teamwork in the clinic is very important; we have to help each other."
 P6: "Professional ethics are the basis of every action I take."
 In this way, the development of soft skills and professionalism becomes a key pillar in the formation of students' clinical capabilities, ensuring they provide safe, ethical, and patient-centered services.

Student Experience in Developing Abilities Clinical through Nursing Education

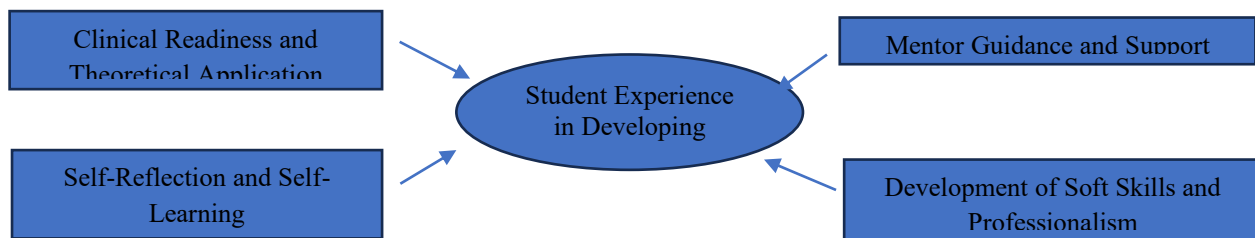


Figure 1: Thematic Model of Student Experience in Developing Abilities Clinical through Nursing Education

The thematic model in Figure 1 above illustrates that the process of students in improving clinical abilities during nursing education is influenced by several interconnected components. Clinical ability is formed through readiness to apply theory, support, and direction from mentors, as well as reflection to improve practice. In addition, strengthening soft skills and professional attitudes also plays an important role. All of these themes show how students develop clinical competencies throughout the nursing education process.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study show that clinical practice plays a role as the main medium for nursing students to develop clinical competence gradually. These findings reinforce the view. (Hwang &

Kim, 2022) That hands-on experience is a very effective learning strategy in the health profession, as it allows students to practice and apply the theories they have learned. This experience not only shapes technical skills but also fosters ethical values, a sense of responsibility, and interpersonal abilities.

Clinical Readiness and Theoretical Application

The first theme shows the challenges experienced by students when they start to enter the field. In the early stages, students feel less confident and have difficulty applying theory to real action. This is in line with the idea of the study. (Berhe & Gebretensaye, 2021) That competency development begins in the early stages, where students still need repeated experiences to understand complex clinical situations. Real practice helps them improve rigor, understand service flows, and make more informed clinical decisions. (Nes et al., 2023). This initial experience also made students aware of the importance of mental readiness before entering practice. In accordance with the experiential learning model (Deruiter & Ginsberg, 2020), Direct involvement in clinical activities helps students connect theory and experience so that their skills are formed more maturely. Thus, educational institutions need to provide practical opportunities from the beginning so that students are better prepared to face the demands of the field.

Mentor Guidance and Support

The second theme emphasizes the importance of the role of mentors in the student learning process. Guidance from supervisors and senior nurses helps students understand clinical procedures more clearly while providing emotional support. This is in line with Wang et al.. (Wang et al., 2022), Those who emphasize that mentoring has a major contribution to the formation of competencies, as well as the increase in student confidence. Mentors act as companions as well as models of professionalism. (Karlsholm et al., 2024). They not only correct students' mistakes, but also guide critical thinking and decision-making. The learning process in the field becomes more directed because students can combine direct experience with correction and direction from mentors. (Dos Santos, 2020). Thus, clinical learning is cyclical: students practice, receive guidance, and improve themselves on an ongoing basis.

Self-Reflection and Self-Learning

The third theme shows that self-reflection is an important part of clinical competency development. By reflecting after practice, students are able to assess the process that has been undertaken, find shortcomings, and plan improvement steps. This view is in line with Pai et al. . (Pai et al., 2021) Who stated that reflection is at the core of professional learning and helps students turn experiences into practical knowledge?. In addition to reflection, students are also active in independent learning, for example, looking for additional scientific sources or discussing with peers. (Jarrar et al., 2022). This activity shows that students not only rely on the guidance of mentors but also take the initiative to strengthen their understanding. The combination of mentoring, reflection, and self-study has been shown to strengthen analytical, adapting, and decision-making skills.

Development of Soft Skills and Professionalism

The fourth theme emphasizes that clinical experience also shapes the character and professionalism of students. In addition to technical skills, students learn to communicate with patients, work in teams, and implement ethical values. This supports the findings. (ALmegewly et al., 2022) That affirms that clinical education contributes greatly to character building, professional ethics, and leadership. Soft skills such as therapeutic communication, empathy, cooperative skills, and conflict management are important parts of a nursing student's competencies. Mastering these skills helps students deal with the dynamics of teamwork and diverse patient needs (Currie et al., 2023). Thus, clinical education is comprehensive because it integrates technical abilities with moral and social aspects.

Implication

Based on the findings of the research, there are several strategic steps that can be implemented to improve the quality of clinical education. First, the curriculum should emphasize continuous practical experience from the beginning of the study program. Second, mentor guidance needs to be optimized to support the mastery of technical skills while building student professionalism. Third, self-reflection and self-learning must be systematically integrated in practice evaluation. Fourth, the development of soft skills and the application of professional ethics need to be the main focus in clinical competency assessment.

CONCLUSION

Clinical practice experience plays an important role in the clinical capability development of nursing students. This process involves readiness to apply theory, mentor guidance, self-reflection, and the development of soft skills and professionalism. A combination of real-world experience, mentorship, and self-reflection forms holistic technical skills, ethics, and interpersonal abilities, so students are prepared to become competent and responsible professional nurses.

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