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Enhancing Leadership and Management Competencies in Nursing Education through Simulation-based Learning: An Integrative Review of Evidence and Best Practices

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Abstract

Background: The development of management and leadership competencies in nursing education is crucial for preparing student nurses for future roles in healthcare. Despite the recognized importance, many nursing programs face challenges in effectively integrating these competencies into their curricula due to faculty shortages and limited clinical placements.

Methods: This integrative review synthesizes findings from studies published between 2008 and 2023 that investigate the impact of simulation-based learning on nursing students' management and leadership skills. A comprehensive search of databases, including MEDLINE, CINAHL, and SCOPUS, was conducted using keywords such as "management," "leadership," "simulation," "nursing," and "education." Data from 10 relevant studies were analyzed to assess the effectiveness of simulation in enhancing nursing competencies.

Results: The review identified significant improvements in nursing students' delegation, communication, collaboration, and decision-making skills following simulation-based experiences. Specifically, studies indicated that simulation enhanced students' confidence in prioritizing tasks and managing workloads, with many participants expressing increased competence in teamwork and critical problem-solving abilities. Quantitative measures revealed that students who engaged in simulation activities scored higher in leadership assessments compared to those who did not.

Conclusion: Simulation-based learning is a valuable pedagogical approach for cultivating essential management and leadership skills in nursing students. The findings underscore the need for nursing

programs to incorporate simulation into their curricula to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application. Future research should focus on standardized assessment tools and the long-term effects of simulation on nursing practice readiness.

Keywords: Nursing Education, Management Competencies, Leadership Skills, Simulation-Based Learning, Clinical Competence.

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1. Introduction

Nursing education is essential for developing student nurses' management and leadership skills for future leadership positions. Numerous organizations, including academic institutions, healthcare agencies, and certifying bodies, emphasize the essential need for graduating student nurses to exhibit leadership and management competencies. The Institute of Medicine and the American Association of Colleges of Nursing advocate that all nursing graduates should possess essential management and leadership competencies for effective collaboration within multidisciplinary healthcare teams [1,2]. Specifically, the American Organization of Nurse Executives (AONE) established the Nurse Managers Competencies Framework to assist nursing schools in crafting undergraduate and graduate curricula that adequately equip students with the requisite management and leadership skills for nurse manager roles. These competencies encompass resource management, patient care delivery management, staff development, adherence to professional and regulatory standards, long-term and strategic planning, inter-professional management and leadership, and collaboration with other institutional units [3].

In several nursing schools, students are given the opportunity to acquire leadership and management abilities by participating in a course during the last year of their undergraduate nursing degree [4-6]. Facilitating and imparting leadership and management skills to nursing students presents a considerable challenge for nursing faculty, attributable to various factors including a surge in nursing student applications, a shortage of nursing faculty, and restricted clinical placements that hinder the integration of leadership concepts into clinical practice. Consequently, numerous nurse managers and executives view newly graduated nurses as inadequately prepared for leadership roles and responsibilities, as well as deficient in management skills upon entering the professional nursing workforce [7].

Alternative pedagogical methods including simulations are essential for effectively equipping students for their prospective leadership positions in the nursing profession. Simulation is recognized as an effective and complementary pedagogical approach to bridge theoretical concepts in nursing with practical application. The incorporation of simulation is deemed essential within the nursing education curriculum and is extensively utilized across all nursing programs [8-10]. The curriculum encompasses the following subjects: Fundamentals of Nursing, Maternal and Child Health, Adult Health, Mental and Psychiatric Health, Community Health, and Critical Care courses [11-16]. Simulation studies have specifically demonstrated that medium- to high-fidelity simulations serve as effective pedagogical tools to enhance students' nursing competence, self-efficacy, critical thinking and reasoning, communication and interpersonal skills, and clinical judgment [16-21].

Many nursing school institutes have endorsed the use of simulation-based activities into their curricula. The National Council of State Boards of Nursing advocates for simulation-based activities as a substitute for traditional clinical experiences to furnish pertinent and vital clinical exposure for nursing students. The National League of Nursing endorses the integration of simulation-based activities in nursing curricula to effectively equip students for future nursing practice in light of the increasing challenges within the healthcare sector [22,23].

Current evidence indicates that nursing schools can cultivate management and leadership competencies in students through simulation. Research by Kilgore et al. [24] and Sharpnack et al. [25] demonstrates that simulation experiences may improve nursing students' management abilities, including prioritization, staff workload management, delegation, collaboration with inter-professional health teams, and critical decision-making. Although there is increasing evidence regarding the application and efficacy

of simulation in management and leadership education, this evidence currently lacks a comprehensive perspective on this vital subject [26-28]. This integrative study sought to evaluate the effects of simulation in pre-licensure nurse management and leadership courses.

2. Methods

This research was inspired by an integrative review strategy based on the framework established by Whittemore and Knafl [26]. This methodology was considered appropriate as it facilitated the synthesis of data from both experimental and non-experimental studies, offering a more comprehensive viewpoint on the subject. A computerized search of databases is conducted to identify relevant papers published between 2008 and 2023. MEDLINE, Psych INFO, CINAHL, and SCOPUS were used to identify and search for original publications using the following search keywords and Medical Subject Headings: 'management', 'leadership', 'simulation', 'nursing', 'education', and 'student'.

3. Acquisition Of Competencies or Comprehension Of Delegation

Five studies evaluated the influence of simulation-based learning on nursing students' development of delegation skills and comprehension of delegation [29-33]. Hourican et al. [34] examined the efficacy of simulation in enhancing management skills among senior nursing students through the use of high-fidelity mannequins and standardized patients. Overall, nursing students indicated increased awareness and understanding in competencies such as prioritizing and managing staff workloads, effective delegation, and ensuring patient safety. In Australia, students exposed to high-fidelity simulation reported enhancements in their skills related to prioritization, delegation, and time management. Three studies conducted in the USA produced analogous results [24,25,29]. Nursing students who participated in simulation scenarios utilizing medium-fidelity simulators and standardized patients achieved superior scores on delegation subscales compared to their counterparts in non-simulation groups. Additionally, senior nursing students exhibited increased knowledge (n = 66, 68%) and elevated confidence levels (n = 53, 55%) regarding patient care delegation and prioritization following simulation exposure. A descriptive qualitative study by Kilgore et al. [24] identified three key themes from nursing student evaluations of simulation: students perceived the experience as realistic, it enhanced their delegation abilities, and it reinforced concepts of leadership and management.

4. Augmented teamwork or collaboration capabilities

A notable theme that emerged from the content analysis was 'teamwork or collaboration,' identified in five studies [24-27,34]. In an Irish study, senior nursing students exposed to simulation scenarios utilizing medium-fidelity simulators achieved higher scores in areas such as providing support to colleagues, teamwork, and interaction with the multidisciplinary team. In a comparative study of nursing students who participated in simulation activities, those who did not attend scored significantly lower on the 'collaborate' subscale of the Nursing Leadership Content Mastery Assessment. A similar outcome was reported in an Australian study, which noted enhancements in competencies including time management, teamwork, and prioritization strategies [32].

The evaluation results of nursing students' simulation, utilizing a researcher-developed simulation-based learning exercise assessment, indicated increased confidence in teamwork among those who participated in a 20-minute simulation activity. A significant theme identified in the qualitative analysis by Kilgore et al. [24] was the improvement in nursing students' capacity to collaborate within the healthcare team, alongside the reinforcement of leadership and management principles acquired in the classroom.

5. Enhanced Decision-Making and Problem-Solving Abilities

The simulation was recognized as a crucial factor in improving decision-making and problem-solving abilities. Che'Reed et al. [28] conducted a leadership management simulation in the USA with students enrolled in a nurse leadership and management course. Following their engagement in a simulation involving a patient with significant incisional pain, the nursing students demonstrated enhanced awareness in key areas of nursing management: emergency response, planning for potential complications, and rapid

clinical decision-making [29,30]. Comparable results were seen in descriptive research conducted by Thomas et al. [31], in which 95% of the 132 senior-level nursing students who participated in simulation experiences reported increased confidence in making ward/unit choices, problem-solving, and critical thinking.

6. Enhanced Communication Abilities

The effects of simulation-based activities on students' skills in communicating effectively with patients and the healthcare team were evaluated in three studies [7,32-34]. In a leadership simulation study by Hourican et al. [34] using medium- and high-fidelity simulators and standardised patients, nursing students (after simulation) reported an increase in competence in communicating with colleagues and the other members of the multidisciplinary healthcare team, along with other competencies such as effectively working with the team, recognising professional and ethical issues, managing staff workloads and dealing with unforeseen events in the ward/unit. In a descriptive study by Thomas et al. [31], there was a higher proportion of nursing students who attended a charge-nurse simulation scenario and expressed an increased knowledge of the charge-nurse role in collaborating and effectively communicating with the staff nurse subordinates and other healthcare team members. In the USA, Gore et al. compared the efficacy of simulated and traditional clinical environments on leadership learning in nursing students [7]. After 30 to 40 minutes of simulation using low-fidelity mannequins, nursing students evaluated their simulation experience using the CLECS. Despite comparable ratings in nursing leadership abilities across the two groups, the communication subscales were much higher among nursing students who participated in conventional learning placements compared to those in the simulation group.

7. Discussion

This integrative review synthesized and evaluated existing evidence on the impact of simulation activities in developing management and leadership abilities in student nurses. This review is based on 10 papers, mostly using quantitative research designs. The researchers discovered some evidence endorsing simulation as a method for teaching management and leadership courses to nursing students; nevertheless, care is warranted in drawing conclusions owing to the limited availability of high-quality information.

Simulation research has shown a beneficial impact of simulation-based activities on nursing students' comprehension and awareness of delegation [35-40]. Delegation is a fundamental responsibility of a professional nurse, defined as "the transfer of responsibility for the performance of an activity from one individual to another while retaining accountability for the outcome." Ineffective delegation frequently results in adverse patient outcomes. Although delegation is recognized as a crucial nursing function, this competency often remains underdeveloped among newly graduated nurses, with pre-licensure education frequently criticized for inadequately preparing nursing students for this vital role. A study in the UK revealed that new nurses experienced limited clinical opportunities to apply the concept of delegation in practice and to cultivate the skills necessary for effective supervision, management, and organization of care during their pre-licensure education. However, nursing faculty can enhance delegation skills and promote the development of these competencies among nursing students; simulation laboratories present a valuable opportunity to nurture this skill [41].

Collaboration and communication surfaced as significant results of the exercise. The Inter-professional Education Collaborative recognised teamwork or collaboration and communication as an important component of a patient-centred care practice [42]. Available studies have identified the relevance of collaborative health practice, which is characterised by constant interaction, communication, collaboration and engagement among interprofessional healthcare workers along with patients and their families in attaining quality healthcare and positive patient outcomes, ultimately reducing costs of healthcare and improving organisational productivity [43,44]. Despite higher emphasis on the importance of effective communication and collaboration during the undergraduate programme, many new nurses expressed challenges in effectively communicating, collaborating and working with other healthcare teams, patients and their relatives [45,46]. This review's finding supports international studies highlighting the essential

role of simulation in enhancing collaboration, communication and teamwork among healthcare workers from different professions [25,47]

Moreover, simulation had a beneficial effect on nursing students' competencies in problem-solving and critical decision-making related to patient care and ward/unit administration. Problem-solving and decision-making are seen as essential activities in nursing. Clinical decision-making among nurses is vital for selecting interventions and treatments for patients and addressing their needs [48]. According to Standing [49], decision-making skills, a fundamental component of quality nursing care, can be cultivated during undergraduate education to prepare future nurses for the realities and challenges of their professional roles. However, many newly graduated nurses have reported deficiencies in these critical skills and expressed dissatisfaction with the insufficient emphasis placed on this area during their education.

While all simulation studies show promise in improving various leadership and management qualities, care is warranted when drawing conclusions owing to specific methodological concerns. Most of the studies examined used either a descriptive design or a one-group pre-test and post-test design. Although several nursing and healthcare researchers have used pre- and post-test designs for their studies, these approaches, in contrast to randomized control trials (RCTs), inadequately account for confounding factors that may influence the intervention results. In contrast, the results of randomized controlled trials (RCTs) provide substantial evidence and are therefore valuable for informing policy implementers, hospital administrators, and nursing leaders. Consequently, any study on simulation should use a more rigorous research strategy [50].

A notable discovery was the absence of standardized instruments in the studies included for assessing leadership and management competencies in nursing students. Four studies used a researcher-developed survey instrument, whereas the other studies assessed simulation results using the SSCL, the Nursing Leadership Content Mastery Assessment, and the CLECS. Despite the validation of these instruments, they lack specificity in assessing leadership and management abilities among nursing students. Foronda et al. assert that assessing simulation effectiveness using known instruments is essential, underscoring the need for a simulation tool tailored to evaluate students' leadership and management abilities. Leadership and management abilities, along with study topics, were assessed by self-report instruments instead of direct measurements of participants' competencies. Baxter and Lederman [51] posited that self-reporting may not accurately reflect true ability or performance; thus, supplementary objective assessment methods should be used to ascertain these critical abilities.

Power analysis or sample calculation is essential, since sample size influences the transferability and generalizability of study results. This evaluation indicates that the majority of the studies examined had insufficient sample sizes, and none used a power analysis to determine the requisite number of samples for achieving statistically significant results. The length of the simulation-based activities varied considerably, spanning from 20 minutes to 1.5 hours, while the debriefing time ranged from 20 minutes to 1 hour. This raises a question about the optimal duration of simulation activities for nursing students to effectuate substantial improvements in their knowledge and abilities. Moreover, the training of simulation facilitators was seldom detailed. These aspects must be taken into account in future simulation research, since they may influence the results of the simulation and, therefore, the generalizability of the findings.

Furthermore, the examined research mostly come from the USA, Ireland, Australia, and Canada. The influx of foreign nurses from Asian nations (China, India, and the Philippines) to Western countries (Canada, the UK, and the USA) raises questions about their readiness to assume nursing leadership positions. This underscores the necessity of incorporating leadership simulation into nursing curricula, particularly in the aforementioned non-Western countries, to ensure that graduates are equipped for future leadership and management roles and possess the requisite managerial and leadership competencies.

Although leadership and management simulations yield promising results, it is evident that additional efforts are required in the design of simulation activities that integrate critical leadership and management competencies as delineated by the AONE, which are essential for the overall productivity and efficacy of any healthcare organization [52].

8. Consequences For Nursing Education

This review's results underscore the efficacy of simulation as a strong instrument in instructing leadership and management courses, as well as its potential to augment specific leadership and management competencies among nursing students. In light of the increasing issues faced by faculty, the integration of simulation in nurse management and leadership courses might significantly improve students' abilities in delegation, problem-solving, decision-making, communication, and cooperation. The integration of simulation-based activities in nursing management, leadership courses, and other nursing curricula may facilitate the application of theoretical knowledge to nursing practice. Nursing schools must guarantee that nursing professors have leadership knowledge and can provide relevant leadership and management simulation courses or training to effectively address the learning goals of pre-licensure nursing students. Furthermore, simulation materials must be supplied to provide a more authentic environment essential for achieving the desired learning results.

9. Summary

This research offered contemporary insights on the status of simulation-based activities within leadership and management courses in pre-licensure nursing programs. This review's results corroborate other simulation studies that emphasize the importance of this pedagogical approach in improving various outcomes for nursing students.

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تعزيز مهارات القيادة والإدارة في تعليم التمريض من خلال التعلم القائم على المحاكاة: مراجعة تكاملية للأدلة وأفضل الممارسات

الملخص

الخلفية :يعد تطوير مهارات القيادة والإدارة في تعليم التمريض أمرًا بالغ الأهمية لإعداد طلاب التمريض للأدوار المستقبلية في مجال الرعاية الصحية. وعلى الرغم من أهمية هذه المهارات، تواجه العديد من برامج التمريض تحديات في دمجها بفعالية في المناهج الدراسية بسبب نقص أعضاء هيئة التدريس ومحدودية أماكن التدريب السريري.

الطرق :تستعرض هذه المراجعة التكاملية الدراسات المنشورة بين عامي 2008 و2023 التي تناولت تأثير التعلم القائم على المحاكاة في تحسين مهارات القيادة والإدارة لدى طلاب التمريض. تم إجراء بحث شامل في قواعد بيانات مثل MEDLINE و CINAHLو SCOPUSباستخدام كلمات مفتاحية مثل "الإدارة"، "القيادة"، "المحاكاة"، "التمريض"، و"التعليم". تم تحليل البيانات من 10 دراسات ذات صلة لتقييم فعالية المحاكاة في تعزيز كفاءات التمريض.

النتائج :أظهرت المراجعة تحسينات ملحوظة في مهارات التفويض، والتواصل، والتعاون، واتخاذ القرارات لدى طلاب التمريض بعد تجارب التعلم القائم على المحاكاة. أشارت الدراسات إلى أن المحاكاة عززت ثقة الطلاب في ترتيب الأولويات وإدارة أعباء العمل، مع تعبير العديد من المشاركين عن زيادة كفاءتهم في العمل الجماعي وحل المشكلات بطريقة نقدية. وكشفت القياسات الكمية أن الطلاب الذين شاركوا في أنشطة المحاكاة حققوا درجات أعلى في تقييمات القيادة مقارنةً بأقرانهم الذين لم يشاركوا.

الخلاصة :يعد التعلم القائم على المحاكاة نهجًا تعليميًا قيمًا لتعزيز مهارات الإدارة والقيادة الأساسية لدى طلاب التمريض. تؤكد النتائج على الحاجة إلى دمج المحاكاة في مناهج برامج التمريض لسد الفجوة بين المعرفة النظرية والتطبيق العملي. وينبغي أن تركز الأبحاث المستقبلية على تطوير أدوات تقييم موحدة ودراسة التأثيرات طويلة المدى للمحاكاة على جاهزية ممارسات التمريض.

الكلمات المفتاحية :تعليم التمريض، كفاءات الإدارة، مهارات القيادة، التعلم القائم على المحاكاة، الكفاءة السريرية.