THE EFFECT OF NURSING STUDENTS ON NURSING PROFESSIONALISM

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Abstract

This study is a descriptive survey research aimed at identifying the effects of empathic ability, gratitude disposition, and self-esteem of nursing students on nursing professionalism. The subjects of this study were 219 nursing students in their second year at S University. Data were collected through a self-administered questionnaire, and data analysis was conducted using SPSS/Win 24.0 PC+ program, including mean, standard deviation, correlation, and regression analysis.

Factors influencing nursing professionalism of nursing students were found to be gratitude disposition ($\beta=.335$, $p<.001$), empathic ability ($\beta=.305$, $p<.001$), good health conditions ($\beta=.216$, $p=.006$), and age between 20 and less than 26 years old ($\beta=.195$, $p=.016$). The total explanatory power was 36.9% (Adj-$R^2=0.351$). It is expected that the results of this study will contribute to the development and operation of nursing professionalism enhancement programs that include gratitude disposition and empathic ability.

Keywords: Nursing student, Empathic ability, Gratitude disposition, self-esteem, Nursing professionalism

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. *The need for research*

Nursing professionalism combines values and attitudes toward nursing as a profession [1], and the proper establishment of nursing professionalism sets nursing as a valuable profession, instilling positive beliefs and capabilities for the future of nursing through professional practice [2]. Nurses, as professionals, must demonstrate professionalism to provide high-quality nursing care, and continuous efforts are needed to firmly establish beliefs and attitudes as professional practitioners to enhance the level of nursing professionalism [3]. In nursing, empathy serves as the cornerstone of therapeutic relationships with patients, being a fundamental prerequisite for providing high-quality care [4]. In clinical settings, higher levels of empathy between patients and nurses have been shown to positively impact patient satisfaction, treatment adherence, accurate diagnosis, interpersonal relationships, communication skills, self-efficacy, and more [5]. Moreover, it has been found to reduce feelings of anxiety and depression known to be associated with patients' mental illnesses [6]. People with high empathic ability are motivated to contact and help others in difficult situations [7], thus, nurses' empathic ability is closely related to professionalism. Empathy is an essential element of care in responding to patients' needs, meaning understanding and feeling the situation and demands of suffering patients through emotional involvement using our perception and imagination [8]. Nursing involves encouraging and empathizing with patients to express their emotions [9], and empathy in nursing can be conveyed to patients through specific nursing actions such as physical contact, listening, being together, and education [10].

Nursing professionalism for nurses refers to the emotional feelings and views nurses have about themselves and the tasks they perform, and a positive professional self-concept is a key variable in the successful performance of nursing professional roles [11].

Gratitude is an emotion that everyone can experience, but people with a high gratitude disposition tend to perceive and express gratitude more frequently as they recognize more often the contributions of others to positive experiences [12]. People with a high gratitude disposition show more positive outcomes compared to those with a low gratitude disposition, exhibiting higher life satisfaction, flexible interpersonal relationships, and prosocial behavior [13]. On the other hand, self-esteem is a psychological response to personal beliefs of competence, worth, and the ability to succeed [14], serving as energy to overcome difficulties and move forward with hope by enhancing awareness of one's positive worth [15].

Therefore, this study attempted to understand the relationship between nursing students' empathic ability, gratitude disposition, self-esteem, and nursing professionalism, and to determine to what extent these factors influence nursing professionalism. This was done in an effort to utilize the findings as educational materials for the proper formation of nursing professionalism for nursing students.

1.2. *Purpose of the Study*

The purpose of this study is to assess the levels of empathic ability, gratitude disposition, self-esteem, and nursing professionalism among nursing students, aiming to provide foundational data for guiding nursing education and developing educational programs.

To assess the levels of empathic ability, gratitude disposition, self-esteem, and nursing professionalism among research participants.

To identify differences in empathic ability, gratitude disposition, self-esteem, and nursing professionalism based on the general characteristics of research participants.

To analyze the correlations between empathic ability, gratitude disposition, self-esteem, and nursing professionalism among research participants.
Identify factors influencing the nursing professionalism of study subjects.

2. Research Method

2.1. *Research Design*
This study is a descriptive survey aimed at identifying the impact of nursing students' empathic ability, gratitude disposition, and self-esteem on nursing professionalism.

2.2. *Participants*
The participants of this study were nursing students in their second year at S University. Participants were convenience-sampled among those who voluntarily agreed to participate in the study after understanding its purpose and providing written consent. The adequacy of the sample size was verified using the G*Power 3.1.4 program [16]. Based on an effect size of medium (.15), a significance level of 5%, a power of 95%, and five predictor variables, the calculation indicated a need for 213 participants. Considering potential difficulties in completing the survey and response rates, a total of 230 surveys were distributed. After excluding 8 surveys that were not returned and 3 surveys with inappropriate or insincere responses, 219 surveys (95.2%) were ultimately used for final analysis.

2.3. *Research Instruments*

2.3.1. *Empathic ability*
Empathy ability was assessed using a tool developed by Davis [17] and validated for reliability and validity by Park [18]. It consists of 28 items, organized into four domains: perspective taking, fantasy, empathic concern, and personal distress, rated on a 5-point Likert scale. Reverse scoring was applied to negative items, where higher scores indicate greater empathy ability. The reliability of the instrument at the time of development was 0.74, and the Cronbach's α value in this study was 0.71.

2.3.2. *Gratitude disposition*
Gratitude disposition was measured using the Korean version of the Gratitude Questionnaire (GQ-6), validated by Kwon, Kim, and Lee [20], which is based on the scale developed by McCullough et al. [19]. This tool assesses the intensity of feeling grateful for positive events, the frequency of experiencing gratitude, the scope of feeling grateful across various areas of life, and the density of feeling grateful to multiple people for a single positive event, comprising a total of 6 items. Scores on a 7-point Likert scale indicate higher levels of gratitude disposition. In the study by Kwon et al. [20], the reliability was 0.86, and in this study, it was 0.91.

2.3.3. *Self-esteem*
Self-esteem was measured using a tool developed by Rosenberg [21] and adapted by Jon [22]. This tool comprises 10 items, with 5 items related to positive self-esteem and 5 items related to negative self-esteem. It is rated on a 5-point Likert scale, where higher scores indicate higher levels of self-esteem. The reliability was .81 at the time of adaptation, and .84 in this study.

2.3.4. *Nursing Professionalism*
Nursing professionalism was measured using a tool modified and supplemented by Han, Kim, and Yun [24] based on the nursing professionalism measurement tool developed by Yeun, Kwon, and Ahn [23]. It is primarily applied to nursing students and nurses, rated on a 5-point Likert scale, where higher scores indicate higher levels of nursing professionalism. The reliability was .92 at the time of development by Yeun et al., .94 in the study by Han, Kim, and Yun [24], and .91 in this study.

2.4. *Data collection*
Structured questionnaires were utilized for data collection between April 1, 2021, and June 30, 2021. Prior to distributing the questionnaires, the researcher ensured participants fully understood the study's purpose and nature, taking ethical considerations into account. Participants were requested to complete the questionnaires independently. The questionnaires explicitly outlined the voluntary and anonymous nature of participation, informed participants of their right to withdraw from the study at any point without repercussions, and assured them of no adverse consequences resulting from their decision. To safeguard participants' information, no identifiable data was included in the questionnaires. Contact details were provided for any further inquiries that may arise. Participants were assured that their data would be discarded after the study's completion and would be solely utilized for research purposes. The estimated time for questionnaire completion was approximately 10 minutes.

2.5. *Data analysis*
The gathered data were subjected to statistical analysis using the SPSS/WIN 24.0 program, with the following procedures:
Descriptive statistics were employed to examine general characteristics, utilizing frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations.
The levels of empathic ability, gratitude disposition, self-esteem, and nursing professionalism among participants were assessed using means and standard deviations.
Pearson's correlation coefficient was employed to investigate the correlations between empathic ability, gratitude disposition, self-esteem, and nursing professionalism among participants.
Multiple regression analysis was conducted to explore the factors influencing nursing professionalism, taking into account participants' general characteristics, empathic ability, gratitude disposition, and self-esteem.

3. Results

3.1. *General characteristics of nursing students*
In this study, the general characteristics of nursing students are as follows (Table 1). Among nursing students, 'good' health conditions were the most prevalent, with 137 individuals (62.6%), and the age group '20 years and older but less than 26 years' had the highest number, with 179 individuals (81.7%). The majority of students, 155 individuals (70.8%), were graded as 'middle,' and college life satisfaction was highest in the 'average' category, with 115 individuals (52.5%). Regarding nursing professionalism education, 'yes' was the most common response, with 151 individuals (68.9%).

<Table 1> The general characteristics of nursing students (N=219)

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Health conditions	Good	137	62.6
	Usually	70	32.0
	Bad	12	5.4
Age	>20	11	5.0
	20-25	179	81.7

	26-29	22	10.0	
	≤30	7	3.3	
	Top	26	11.9	
Grades	Middle	155	70.8	
	Bad	38	17.3	
	Very high	5	2.3	
College life satisfaction	High	66	30.1	
	Normal	115	52.5	
	Low	33	15.1	
Total		**219**	**100.0**	

3.2. *The levels of empathic ability, gratitude disposition, self-esteem, and nursing professionalism among nursing students*

In this study, Table 2 presents the mean scores and standard deviations of empathic ability, gratitude disposition, self-esteem, and nursing professionalism among nursing students.

The mean scores and standard deviations for empathic ability were 3.23 ± 0.28 (out of 5), for gratitude disposition were 4.39 ± 0.51 (out of 7), for self-esteem were 2.71 ± 0.37 (out of 4), and for nursing professionalism were 3.33 ± 0.43 (out of 5). The mean scores for the sub-items were as follows: 'professional self-concept' had an average score of 3.70 ± 0.54, 'social perception' had an average score of 2.99 ± 0.75, 'nursing expertise' had an average score of 3.78 ± 0.61, 'nursing role' had an average score of 3.96 ± 0.60, and 'nursing autonomy' had an average score of 1.76 ± 0.81.

<Table 2>
The levels of empathic ability, gratitude disposition, self-esteem, and nursing professionalism among nursing students (N=219)

Variable	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Mean±SD
Empathic ability	1-5	2.57	5.00	3.23±0.28
Gratitude disposition	1-7	2.83	5.67	4.39±0.51
Self-esteem	1-4	1.70	3.90	2.71±0.37
Nursing professionalism	1-5	2.11	5.00	3.33±0.43
Professional self-concept	1-5	2.17	5.00	3.70±0.54
Social awareness Nursing	1-5	1.00	5.00	2.99±0.75
Nursing expertise	1-5	2.00	5.00	3.78±0.61
The role of the nursing	1-5	2.50	5.00	3.96±0.60
Uniqueness of nursing	1-5	1.00	5.00	1.76±0.81

3.3. The differences in empathic ability, gratitude disposition, self-esteem, and nursing professionalism among nursing students

The results of the analysis of differences in empathic ability, gratitude disposition, self-esteem, and nursing professionalism based on the general characteristics of nursing students are presented in Table 3.

Empathic ability showed a statistically significant difference in 'college life satisfaction' (F=3.73, p=.012). Post-hoc analysis revealed that 'very high' college life satisfaction was significantly higher than 'average'. Gratitude disposition exhibited statistically significant differences in 'health conditions' (F=5.35, p=.005), 'Grades' (F=10.91, p<.001), and 'college life satisfaction' (F=11.57, p<.001). Post-hoc analysis indicated that 'good' health conditions were higher than 'average', 'high' grades were higher than 'middle' and 'low' grades, and 'very high' college life satisfaction was higher than 'low', while 'high' was higher than 'average' and 'low'.

In terms of nursing professionalism, there were statistically significant differences in 'health conditions' (F=8.29, p<.001), 'Age' (F=3.56, p=.016), and 'college life satisfaction' (F=4.29, p=.006). Post-hoc analysis revealed that 'good' health conditions were higher than 'average' and 'poor', '20 years and older but less than 26 years' age group was higher than '26 years and older but less than 30 years', and 'very high' college life satisfaction was higher than 'low'.

<Table 3> The differences in empathic ability, gratitude disposition, self-esteem, and nursing professionalism among nursing students
(N=219)

Variable	categories	empathic ability			gratitude disposition			self-esteem			nursing professionalism		
		Mean±SD	t/F	p	Mean±SD	t/F	p	Mean±SD	t/F	p	Mean±SD	t/F	p
Health conditions	Good[a]	3.24±0.31	1.14	.321	4.48±0.45	5.350	.005	2.73±0.34	0.659	.518	3.42±0.45	8.285	<.001
	Usually[b]	3.19±0.22			4.24±0.56		a>b	2.69±0.41			3.20±0.34		a>b
	Bad	3.29±0.3			4.28±0.5			2.63±0.3			3.10±0.3		a>c

		0			1			7			0		
Age (years)	>20[a]	3.19±0.29	0.958	.414	4.39±0.64	0.114	.952	2.74±0.26	0.237	.870	3.23±0.67	3.562	.015
	20-25[b]	3.24±0.30			4.39±0.51			2.72±0.38			3.37±0.41		b>c
	26-29[c]	3.18±0.19			4.40±0.43			2.66±0.35			3.07±0.30		
	≤30	3.10±0.21			4.50±0.51			2.67±0.22			3.37±0.45		
Grades	Top[a]	3.22±0.22	0.519	.596	4.76±0.35	10.912	<.001	2.76±0.33	0.829	.438	3.40±0.50	2.225	.111
	Middle[b]	3.22±0.27			4.38±0.49		a>b	2.72±0.37			3.35±0.38		
	Bad[c]	3.27±0.36			4.19±0.55		a>c	2.65±0.36			3.20±0.52		
College life satisfaction	Very high[a]	3.58±0.16	3.727	.012	4.83±0.17	11.574	<.001	2.96±0.29	0.979	.404	3.79±0.62	4.287	.006
	High[b]	3.22±0.30		a>c	4.64±0.39		a>d	2.72±0.31			3.43±0.36		a>d
	Normal	3.20±0.27			4.30±0.48		b>c, d	2.69±0.38			3.28±0.43		
	Low	3.30±0.29			4.15±0.63			2.75±0.43			3.25±0.46		

<Table 4> The correlation among empathic ability, gratitude disposition, self-esteem, and nursing professionalism of nursing students
(N=219)

Variable	1	2	3	4	4-1	4-2	4-3	4-4	4-5
	r(p)	r(p)	r(p)	r(p)	r(p)	r(p)	r(p)	r(p)	r(p)
empathic ability	1								
gratitude disposition	.29 (<.001)	1							
self-esteem	.23 (<.001)	.15 (<.029)	1						
nursing professionalism	.44 (<.001)	.46 (<.001)	.15 (<.029)	1					
Professional self-concept	.39 (<.001)	.41 (<.001)	.21 (<.002)	.79 (<.001)	1				
Social awareness Nursing	.27 (<.001)	.37 (<.001)	.00 (<.967)	.81 (<.001)	.42 (<.001)	1			
Nursing expertise	.33 (<.001)	.29 (<.001)	.18 (<.007)	.68 (<.001)	.51 (<.001)	.36 (<.001)	1		
The role of the nursing	.31 (<.001)	.40 (<.001)	.18 (<.006)	.63 (<.001)	.58 (<.001)	.32 (<.001)	.64 (<.001)	1	
Uniqueness of nursing	.06 (<.354)	-.07 (<.312)	-.07 (<.291)	.02 (<.721)	-.23 (<.001)	.06 (<.379)	-26 (<.001)	-.37 (<.001)	1

1. Empathic ability, 2. Gratitude disposition, 3. Self-esteem, 4. Nursing professionalism, 4-1. Professional self-concept, 4-2. Social awareness Nursing, 4-3. Nursing expertise, 4-4. The role of the nursing, 4-5. Uniqueness of nursing

3.4. The correlation among empathic ability, gratitude disposition, self-esteem, and nursing professionalism of nursing students

In this study, the correlations among empathic ability, gratitude disposition, self-esteem, and nursing professionalism of nursing students are displayed in Table 4.

There was a significant positive correlation between empathic ability and gratitude disposition (r=.29, p<.001), self-esteem (r=.23, p<.001), and nursing professionalism (r=.44, p<.001). Gratitude disposition showed significant positive correlations with self-esteem (r=.15, p=.029) and nursing professionalism (r=.46, p<.001), while self-esteem exhibited a significant positive correlation with nursing professionalism (r=.15, p=.029).

5. Factors influencing nursing professionalism among nursing students

To explore the factors affecting nursing professionalism among nursing students, multiple regression analysis was conducted, incorporating health conditions, age, and college life satisfaction as independent variables, given their significant differences in empathic ability, gratitude disposition, self-esteem, and nursing professionalism. The findings are outlined in Table 5.

The Durbin-Watson statistic, examining the independence of residuals within the regression model, yielded a value of 1.888, suggesting no autocorrelation. Tolerance values ranged from 0.851 to 0.968, surpassing the threshold of 0.1, while the variance inflation factor (VIF) ranged from 1.033 to 1.175, well below the cutoff of 10, indicating no multicollinearity and satisfying the assumptions for multiple regression analysis.

Among these variables, health conditions, age, and college life satisfaction were treated as dummy variables. The multiple regression analysis results revealed that gratitude disposition (β=.335, p<.001), empathic ability (β=.305, p<.001), good health conditions (β=.216, p=.006), and an age of 20 years or older but less than 26 years (β=.195, p=.016) were the factors influencing nursing professionalism among nursing students. The overall explanatory power was 36.9% (Adj-R2=0.351).

\<Table 5\> The impact of nursing students on nursing professionalism (N=219)

Variables		Model 1					
		B	SE	β	t	p	VIF
(Constants)		.378	.322		1.18	.241	
General characteristics	Health conditions	.245	.093	.216	2.65	.006	1.059
	Age	.215	.085	.195	2.54	.016	1.033
	College life satisfaction	.400	.134	.239	2.98	.237	1.060
Empathic ability		.458	.089	.305	5.16	<.001	1.175
Gratitude disposition		.280	.049	.335	5.71	<.001	1.156
Self-esteem		.005	.066	.004	0.08	.938	1.069

R^2=.369 (Adj-R^2=.351) F=20.663 p<.001

Durbin-Watson =1.888 VIF=1.033~1,175 Tolerance = 0.851~0.968

Dummy variables (Health conditions = good, age = 20 to 26, College life satisfaction = Satisfied)

4. Conclusion

This study aimed to investigate the impact of empathic ability, gratitude disposition, and self-esteem on the nursing professionalism required in clinical settings among nursing college students. The goal was to provide foundational data for establishing nursing professionalism as future nurses after graduation.

The general characteristics of the subjects in this study showed significant differences based on health conditions, age, grades, and college life satisfaction. Particularly, post-hoc analysis revealed that nursing professionalism was higher when the respondents reported 'good' health conditions and 'very high' college life satisfaction. This suggests that nursing professionalism is associated with a sense of dedication to the nursing profession, tied to one's beliefs and values. Respondents who perceived themselves as physically healthy and expressed positive views about college life showed higher levels of satisfaction. This can be interpreted as a positive response to values and professionalism related to their health, as nurses need to maintain professionalism for the well-being of their patients. Moreover, Jung's study [25] indicated that subjective health conditions were factors influencing nursing professionalism among nursing college students. This suggests the need to plan and implement extracurricular tailored programs for subjective health conditions.

In this study, the factor that most significantly influenced nursing professionalism among nursing students was gratitude disposition. Research on nursing professionalism and gratitude disposition is still lacking, and further studies are needed to clarify this relationship. Lee & Lee's study [26] targeted novice nursing students and identified gratitude disposition as the most

significant factor influencing nursing professionalism. They mentioned that when developing programs to enhance nursing professionalism among nursing students, gratitude disposition should be prioritized.

The second factor influencing nursing professionalism among nursing students was empathic ability. In this study, empathic ability emerged as the next influential factor on nursing professionalism. Empathic ability is a critical skill in establishing the foundation of relationships between nurses and patients[27]. Higher levels of empathic ability have been shown to contribute to providing quality nursing care that satisfies patients [28].

The study findings revealed that the most influential factors on nursing students' gratitude disposition were gratitude disposition itself, followed by empathic ability and health conditions. Therefore, in order to establish nursing professionalism correctly, it will be necessary to explore various research methods and approaches that enable nursing students to maintain and enhance positive attitudes and physical well-being associated with gratitude disposition and empathic ability. This study has provided insights into the factors that impact nursing professionalism among nursing students. It is anticipated that these findings will guide the development of educational programs and initiatives geared towards nurturing nurses into professionals who are more focused on their vocation and driven by their values.

In terms of the study's constraints and future research recommendations for enhancing nursing professionalism among nursing students, several suggestions are proposed. Firstly, expanding the participant pool and conducting repeated studies would offer greater clarity in elucidating the relationship with nursing professionalism. Secondly, to elevate nursing professionalism among nursing students, diverse programs and systematic educational policies are necessary, calling for ongoing research and management efforts. Lastly, conducting qualitative research could deepen our understanding of nursing students' experiences, thereby facilitating the identification of factors influencing nursing professionalism.

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