



Clinical education

Improvement of learning domains of nursing students with the use of authentic assessment pedagogy in clinical practice



Edmund Jun Meng Chong^{a,*}, Jessica Shih Wei Lim^a, Yuchan Liu^a, Yvonne Yen Lin Lau^a, Vivien Xi Wu^b

^a Nursing Department, School of Applied and Health Sciences, Institute of Technical Education, Singapore

^b Alice Lee Centre for Nursing Studies, Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine, National University of Singapore, Singapore

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ABSTRACT

With evolving healthcare demands, nursing educators need to constantly review their teaching methodologies in order to enhance learners' knowledge and competency of skills in the clinical settings. Learning is an active process in which meaning is accomplished on the basis of experience and that authentic assessment pedagogy will enable nursing students to play an active part in their learning.

The study was conducted with an aim to examine nursing students' learning domains through the introduction of the authentic assessment pedagogy during their clinical practice. A quasi-experimental study (n = 54) was conducted over a period of 10 weeks at a local tertiary hospital. The experimental group was exposed to the authentic assessment pedagogy and were taught to use the assessment rubrics as an instrument to help enhance their learning. Students were assessed and scored according to the assessment rubrics, which were categorized into four domains; cognitive, psychomotor, affective and critical thinking abilities.

The findings indicated that an overall score for the four domains between the experimental and control groups were significant, with *p* value of <0.05. Critical thinking scores were indicative of consistent improvement within the experimental group. The findings confirmed that learning outcomes of the nursing students were enhanced through the early introduction of the authentic assessment pedagogy in the clinical setting.

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1. Introduction

Conditions such as increased patient acuity, workforce shortages, and tight financial control have added more roles to the already stretched responsibilities of a nurse. Nurses in Singapore are now empowered to carry out more complex tasks, such as ordering laboratory tests and even performing medical procedures (Tai, 2015). These changes in the healthcare arena have reinforced the importance of new graduates arriving in the work setting with the ability to move seamlessly into practice.

Competent nurses are required to assess a patient, make clinical judgement which takes into account the context, and develops a sound patient care plan (Khan et al., 2012). This idea of moving seamlessly into practice is often referred to as practice readiness. Patient assessment and management are becoming more complex

with the aging population and patients are often presented with more co-morbidities. While the nursing curriculum is comprehensive and covers all essential skills, many new graduates are not ready to be independent practitioners. Therefore, it is essential to revise the education model (Stanley and Dougherty, 2010).

Nursing curriculum places much emphasis on skill acquisitions (Ozturk et al., 2015). This is to ensure nurses are competent in their technical skills. However, in reality, patient care goes beyond isolated nursing interventions such as wound cleaning or taking of parameters. The nurse must be reactive to situations and also display a caring disposition (Larin et al., 2014). This rote learning style among novice nurses, are especially glaring during the clinical practice, where students are required to practice their skills in an authentic environment.

Educational institutes thus have an important role to ensure that nursing students acquire the necessary skills to bridge the theory-practice gap before they become full-fledged nurses. This gap is defined as an inconsistency between what the students learn

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: edmund_chong@ite.edu.sg (E.J.M. Chong).

in classroom and what they experience in the clinical setting (Jones, 1997). Therefore, the introduction of innovative pedagogies is needed to develop the nursing students holistically. Kolb described one such pedagogy as experiential learning: “where knowledge is created through the transformation of experience” (1984, p. 38). Authentic assessment pedagogy is one such innovative pedagogy and it is designed to measure the students’ ability to apply the knowledge acquired during their care of the patients (Henson, 2010).

2. Background

Horsfall et al. (2012) states that teaching pedagogy includes deliberation about the nature of knowledge taught and how students absorbed the information. The traditional model focuses on teacher being the content expert and they provide knowledge regardless to the learning needs of the learners (Kantor, 2010). As such, increasing knowledge does not address the goal of advancing critical thinking and decision making skills in nursing education (Vacek, 2009).

Student-centred model emphasize that learners are seekers of knowledge; therefore the focus is no longer on content coverage, rather to apply the knowledge towards analytical thinking (Stanley and Dougherty, 2010). Authentic assessment activities are intended to mimic the ‘real world’ situations that nursing students may encounter in their professional life (Raymond et al., 2013). It provides educators the opportunity to introduce new learning methods that favour probing, and improves learners’ understanding of knowledge (Vanaki and Memarian, 2009). Thus, authentic assessment pedagogy is a student-centred model which permits different ways of responding. Authentic assessment pedagogy enhances students understanding, which provides theoretical foundation for integrating psychomotor skills, attitudes and critical thinking skills during the care of patient. The expectations of a nurse require competencies from domains; such as cognitive, psychomotor, affective and critical thinking abilities towards safer patient care (SNB, 2012). Hence, authentic assessment pedagogy could integrate the four domains and promote the holistic learning for the students in the clinical practice.

Cognitive domain emphasises that nurses need to have a sound theoretical knowledge in order to be competent practitioners and this includes the recall or recognition of specific facts and concepts to the evaluation of clinical decision (Pepin et al., 2011). The link between knowledge and performance is always a challenge for students in nursing education (Shipman et al., 2012). Therefore psychomotor domain stresses the importance of knowledge and skills teaching provided in classroom which are reinforced during clinical practice. Researchers emphasised that a lack of competency can compromise patient’s safety (Ozturk et al., 2015). On the other hand, nursing care requires application of not only cognitive and psychomotor skills, but also development of affective skills (Weis and Schanks, 2002; Miller, 2010) and this consists of student’s attitudes and behaviours such as effective communication and caring during the care of the patient (Krathwohl et al., 1964; Cook and Cullen, 2003). The increased complex role of the nurse requires higher levels of critical thinking and clinical judgement skills (Lisko and O’Dell, 2010). Popil (2011) shared that critical thinking is essential for bridging the theory and practice gap in nursing through the application of cognitive, psychomotor and affective domains. This is necessary for nurses to make sound decision and develop them as competent practitioners in the clinical setting (Kostovich et al., 2007; Vacek, 2009). The fundamental role of critical thinking is for decision making in nursing practice as it ensures the improvement provision of a quality and safe care. Hence, critical thinking offers a standpoint that is consistent with

the realisms of nursing (Staib, 2003).

Additional evidence supporting the use of authentic assessment in the clinical setting highlighted that a safe and effective nurse will need to have the synthesis of knowledge, skills and attitude in order to make critical and clinically sound decision (Andreou et al., 2014; Martyn et al., 2014). With the combination of the above mentioned domains, this will make a difference to patient’s safety as it allows the nurse to identify a patient’s problem, carries out appropriate interventions with sound clinical reasoning. The authentic assessment pedagogy is designed to enhance the ability of the nursing students to analyze situation, make clinical judgements and respond to clinical situation timely (Henson, 2010; Raymond et al., 2013). Hence, authentic assessment pedagogy can be inferred to as a purposeful reflective process that involves the praxis of both thoughts and actions.

The current clinical assessment focuses predominantly on two domains (cognitive and psychomotor domain). But the expectations of a nurse require competencies from all domains; namely; cognitive, psychomotor, affective and critical thinking abilities towards safe patient care (SNB, 2012). Changes in healthcare delivery, with improvement of information technology and demands for evidence-based practice, have changed the way nurses need to nurse their patient. As the paradigm of nursing care is shifting (Stanley and Dougherty, 2010), this serves a strong reason to review and redesign the current pedagogy to provide a holistic pedagogy for nursing students.

3. Methods

3.1. Aim

This study aims to examine the use of authentic assessment pedagogy and its impact on the improvements in nursing students’ learning domains during clinical practice. This study was conducted for the nursing students during their clinical practice at a tertiary hospital.

3.2. Design

A quantitative approach using quasi-experimental study was adopted. The participants were assigned to an experimental group (26 students) and a control group (28 students). Students in the experimental group adopted the authentic assessment (AA) rubric as a pedagogical tool. They received feedback from their peers, patients, and clinical lecturer. They performed reflective thinking about self after each nursing skills. Students in the control group continued using the existing clinical pedagogical practice whereby they received feedback after performing each skill from clinical lecturer.

3.3. Participants

Purposive sampling was used to recruit nursing students in a post-secondary institution in Singapore. The inclusion criteria were first-year nursing students who enrolled in a nursing clinical practice module that focused on both nursing knowledge and skills in a local tertiary hospital.

3.4. Data collection

This study was implemented over a period of ten weeks. The learning objectives, use of assessment rubric and feedback session were communicated with the nursing students at the first week. This helped students to set clear learning goals and increase awareness of the assessment criteria. A detailed feedback

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