



## Nursing students' critical thinking disposition according to academic level and satisfaction with nursing

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### SUMMARY

**Background:** The development of critical thinking dispositions has become an important issue in nursing education in Korea. Nursing colleges in Korea have developed teaching strategies and curricula that focus on developing critical thinking dispositions. It is an imperative step that evaluates the changing pattern and development of students' critical thinking dispositions.

**Objectives:** This study identified critical thinking dispositions of Korean nursing students according to academic level and satisfaction with nursing.

**Methods:** A cross-sectional questionnaire survey was conducted among 1074 students in four colleges who completed the self-reported Critical Thinking Disposition Scale. Descriptive and univariate general linear model analyses were performed.

**Results:** The critical thinking disposition score increased according to academic level until junior year, after which it decreased in the senior year. Nursing students who were satisfied with nursing reported higher levels of critical thinking than those who were not satisfied or who responded neutrally.

**Conclusions:** The critical thinking scores of nursing students not satisfied with nursing dropped greatly in the senior year. These results suggest the importance of targeting the development of curriculum and teaching methods for seniors and students who have a lower level of satisfaction with nursing to increase their critical thinking dispositions.

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### Introduction

Critical thinking is part of the process of purposeful self-regulatory judgment. This process gives reasoned consideration to interactive interpretation, analysis, inference, and evaluation (Profetto-McGrath et al., 2009). Critical thinking is regarded as the basis of professional judgment and has the potential to improve the quality of judgments and decisions in clinical practice (Fesler-Birch, 2005). This type of thinking is not considered to be a genetic disposition, and it has been suggested that nurses may need to be educated to think critically (Mantzoukas and Watkinson, 2007). Therefore, promoting a critical thinking disposition has been one goal of nursing education for many years (Del Bueno, 2005). Critical thinking disposition as an intellectual character trait is the personal and subjective disposition of value. One

uses critical thinking in response to problems and choices encountered in both one's personal and professional situations and is regarded as an important attribute of the critical thinking process (Facione et al., 1994; Lee, 2008). The development of critical thinking dispositions has become an important issue in nursing education in Korea. Nursing educators have constantly applied and considered developing more effective teaching strategies and methods to enhance the critical thinking skills of their students.

Numerous studies have explored critical thinking dispositions in nursing education. However, studies regarding the changing pattern of critical thinking dispositions of students are rare. It is important to investigate the changing pattern of critical thinking skills of students according to their academic level to better understand the factors associated with changes in critical thinking disposition for developing more effective teaching strategies and methods. Therefore, we analyzed the critical thinking dispositions of nursing students according to their academic level and satisfaction with nursing.

### Background

As critical thinking disposition is considered an essential part of nursing education, many studies on teaching strategies and curricular

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development have been reported (Morrall and Goodman, 2013; Nair and Stamler, 2013; Tuden et al., 2013). The Korean Accreditation Board of Nursing suggests that critical thinking is one of the core abilities that should be expected as an outcome of a nursing education (Kim et al., 2006). Nursing colleges in Korea have developed teaching strategies and curricula focused on developing better critical thinking dispositions and it is imperative to evaluate the changing pattern and development of students' critical thinking.

Critical thinking disposition is affected by the experience and knowledge gained from nursing education (Profetto-McGrath, 2005). As students' academic level progresses, they gain more knowledge and experience associated with critical thinking. Therefore, critical thinking also increases, and can be further developed in nursing students (Martin, 2002; Oh et al., 2011). However, previous study results have been inconsistent. The development of critical thinking dispositions should be analyzed to consider variables such as special characteristics and the culture of the students or their curriculum (Tiwari et al., 2003).

In addition, students' satisfaction with nursing has been suggested to play an important role in developing learning ability (Park, 2011; Shin et al., 2008). Among nursing students in Korea, employability was the most influential factor that affected choosing a nursing major, not aptitude in nursing (Cho et al., 2010). Students who chose nursing as a major because of employability options alone could lose their interest in learning nursing in the long run, which could affect their development of critical thinking skills. Nursing educators should consider various curricula for students who have different satisfaction levels with the nursing profession. In these situations, it is important to identify critical thinking disposition according to satisfaction with nursing.

The present research investigated the differences in critical thinking disposition according to academic level and satisfaction with nursing and was conducted with a group ranging from freshmen to senior nursing students using a cross-sectional design.

## Methods

### Participants and Setting

This study targeted nursing students from baccalaureate programs at four universities located in the cities of Seoul, Gyeonggi, and Ulsan in Korea. All freshmen, sophomore, junior, and senior students from the four programs, which is 4 years in length, were invited to participate. The total number of participants was 1077 students and, of these, 1074 were included in the final analysis after incomplete surveys were eliminated. Participants were recruited from December 1 to 31, 2011, which marked the end of a school year. Participants completed a self-report questionnaire, which included a scale that measures critical thinking disposition and general characteristics. The questionnaire was completed in 15 to 25 minutes.

### Instruments

The Critical Thinking Disposition Scale (CTDS), developed by Kwon et al. (2006) was used to measure critical thinking disposition. Because it was developed for Korean nursing students, we selected this scale because it considers cultural differences. Skills in critical thinking can provide creative solutions and multiple pathways required for successful quality-improvement initiatives. A critical thinking disposition describes attributes or habits of the mind that are integral to an individual's beliefs or actions, which are conducive to critical thinking skills (Facione et al., 1995; Kwon et al., 2006). Therefore, the subscales of the CTDS include intellectual integrity (six items), creativity (four items), challenge (six items), open-mindedness (three items), prudence (four items), objectivity (four items), truth seeking (three items), and inquisitiveness (five items). The CTDS consists of 35 items using five-point Likert scale. The total score ranges from 35 to 175, with a higher score indicating a

higher level of critical thinking disposition. The internal reliability coefficient for the CTDS in the original study of 560 Korean nursing students (Kwon et al., 2006) was 0.892, and the factors' internal reliability ranged from 0.562 to 0.832. In this study, the reliability coefficient was 0.877, and factors' internal reliability ranged from 0.573 to 0.822.

The satisfaction with nursing was measured using the question "How are you satisfied with the nursing major?" on a five-point scale (1—very dissatisfied, 5—very satisfied.).

### Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using the SPSS version 20 (SPSS Inc., Chicago, IL, USA). Descriptive statistics, such as the mean, standard deviation, frequency, and percentage were utilized to obtain general characteristics of the participants. *t* tests, analysis of variance (ANOVA), and the Sheffe test were used to determine significant differences in gender, age, academic level, and satisfaction with nursing. A univariate general linear model (GLM) was used to analyze the critical thinking disposition score according to academic level and satisfaction with nursing.

### Ethical Considerations

This study was approved by two universities' institutional review boards (IRB). These approvals were also used for the other universities, located in Gyeonggi and Ulsan, as these universities did not have an IRB, and the research methods were identical. Taking the ethical aspect of the procedure into account, participants were informed of the purpose of the study and their right to refuse to participate. They were also informed that there would be no penalties for refusing the survey, and then the researchers distributed and collected the questionnaires onsite.

## Results

As shown in Table 1, the majority of participants were female (95.5%) and under 25 years of age (96.8%). There were 314 freshmen (29.2%), 283 sophomores (26.4%), 240 juniors (22.3%), and 237

**Table 1**  
Critical thinking disposition by general characteristics.

Characteristics	n (%)	Critical thinking disposition			
		Mean ± SD	t or F	p	Scheffe
n = 1074					
Gender					
Male	48 (4.5)	124.24 ± 14.63	2.76	0.01	
Female	1026 (95.5)	118.82 ± 12.82			
Age					
18–20 <sup>a</sup>	509 (47.4)	116.89 ± 12.46	11.48	0.001	a < b
20–25 <sup>b</sup>	531 (49.4)	120.78 ± 13.07			a < d
26–30 <sup>c</sup>	30 (2.8)	122.59 ± 12.30			
>30 <sup>d</sup>	4 (0.4)	140.67 ± 6.35			
Academic year					
Freshman <sup>a</sup>	314 (29.2)	116.53 ± 13.10	10.59	0.001	a, b, d < c
Sophomore <sup>b</sup>	283 (26.4)	118.93 ± 11.85			
Junior <sup>c</sup>	240 (22.3)	122.76 ± 12.29			
Senior <sup>d</sup>	237 (22.1)	118.77 ± 13.78			
Satisfaction with nursing					
Dissatisfied <sup>a</sup>	61 (5.7)	114.38 ± 16.21	29.81	0.001	a, b < c
Neutral <sup>b</sup>	337 (31.4)	115.31 ± 12.08			
Satisfied <sup>c</sup>	671 (62.5)	121.39 ± 12.41			
Colleges					
A	287 (26.7)	117.55 ± 13.02	2.89	0.03	
B	332 (30.9)	120.55 ± 12.98			
C	202 (18.8)	119.35 ± 12.77			
D	253 (23.6)	118.52 ± 12.79			
Total	1074 (100)	119.05 ± 12.94			

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