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Original Article

Nursing Ethics Education: Fostering Moral Courage through Pedagogy in the Pakistani Context

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Abstract

Background: Nursing students in Pakistan must graduate prepared to bravely enact the art and science of nursing in environments infiltrated with ethical challenges. Given the necessity and moral obligation of nurses to engage in discourse within nursing ethics, nursing students must be provided a morally supportive learning space for these opportunities. The Pakistani healthcare sector is hampered by the absence of ethics courses in the curriculum, the non-existence of hospital ethics committees or Institutional Review Boards (IRBs) in most hospitals, and the existence of only one non-indexed ethics journal. The objective of this research is to explore the influence of a structured self-assessment tool called the "Engagement Self-Assessment" (ESA) on the alignment and creation of a brave space in a nursing ethics course for nursing students in Pakistan.

Methodology: This study used an exploratory, cross-sectional survey design. Data from 39 undergraduate nursing students enrolled in a nursing course using the ESA were recruited from Koochi Goth College of Nursing and Midwifery, Karachi-Pakistan. Participation was voluntary and informed without coercion. Written consent was obtained before participation. Research ethics approval was obtained by the Institutional Research Ethics Board of the Malir University of Science and Technology.

Results: The ESA provided structured self-reflection on the impact of shared vulnerability within a brave space. However, commitment to a brave space was not strongly influenced by the ESA, but rather by a mutual "commitment to others."

Conclusion: A teaching tool such as an ESA can be used to facilitate instructor expectations of civil discourse and discussion of difficult topics. Rules of engagement such as those found in brave spaces can help transform fear of vulnerability into authentic growth for learners. A morally supportive learning space can support critical opportunities for ethical development. This study provides insight into how self-assessment and the use of a brave space in nursing ethics education can facilitate a morally supportive learning space in the Pakistani context.

Keywords

Nursing, Ethics Education, Moral Courage, Pedagogy, Pakistan

Introduction

Nursing education plays a pivotal role in preparing students to navigate the complex landscape of healthcare, particularly in addressing ethical dilemmas that are inherent in the profession¹. In Pakistan, where the healthcare sector faces unique challenges and ethical considerations, nursing students must be equipped with the necessary skills and mindset to engage in ethical discourse and decision-making^{1,2}. However, the current educational landscape in Pakistan may lack structured opportunities for students to develop moral courage and engage in critical discussions on ethical issues within nursing².

The concept of brave spaces, which provide a supportive environment for open dialogue and shared vulnerability, offers a promising framework for fostering moral courage and ethical development among nursing students³. By creating a space where students can engage in civil discourse and confront difficult topics, educators can help cultivate a culture of ethical awareness and responsibility within the nursing profession in Pakistan^{4,5}.

By examining the influence of the ESA^{6,7} on students' engagement with ethical discussions and their commitment to creating a morally supportive learning environment, this research seeks to provide valuable insights into the role of self-assessment and brave spaces in nursing ethics education in the Pakistani context.

This study aimed to provide new insights into the use of a brave space in a nursing ethics course while offering pedagogical tools that align with brave spaces in the Pakistani context. The study also explored the impact of brave spaces on the development of moral sensitivity and moral courage among nursing students in Pakistan. The findings of this study can help nursing educators in Pakistan foster nurses who can courageously engage in difficult conversations situated in ethics.

Methodology

This study employed an exploratory cross-sectional survey design to investigate the impact of a

structured self-assessment tool, the Engagement Self-Assessment (ESA), on the alignment and creation of a brave space in a nursing ethics course for undergraduate nursing students in Pakistan. The participants were recruited from Koochi Goth College of Nursing and Midwifery, Karachi-Pakistan, with a purposeful sample of students enrolled in a nursing healthcare ethics and law course using the ESA. The course was delivered in a synchronous, face-to-face format within discussion-based learning and taught by the primary author of the research team.

A total of 39 female participants completed the questionnaire. The participants' age ranged from 18-30 years, with 25 students aged 18-25 years, seven students aged 26-30 years, and seven students over 30 years of age. The students identified as Pakistani, with diverse ethnic backgrounds, including Sindhi, Pashto, Pathan, Punjabi, Balochi etc.

Data was collected from the research participants' overall ESA marks and course grades and their ESA exit questionnaire responses. The ESA exit questionnaire was open for two weeks at the end of the course and contained questions related to learning, engagement, and brave spaces using Likert scales and open-text responses asking for participant elaboration of their chosen Likert response. Only questionnaire responses related to the influence of the ESA on a brave space are discussed in this manuscript. These questions included:

1. On a scale of 1-5, how would you rate the influence of the ESA on your learning in the course?
2. On a scale of 1-5, how would you rate the influence of the ESA on the creation of a brave space in this course?
3. On a scale of 1-5, how would you rate the alignment of the ESA with your definition of brave space in the classroom?

Data analysis involved quantitative and qualitative methods. Quantitative data using the final ESA mark and course grades were analyzed with inferential and descriptive statistics. The

questionnaire was analyzed in both quantitative and qualitative manners. Open-text responses were analyzed using thematic analysis. Individual responses were organized under each question. Each response was read line by line. Keywords and repetitive words were highlighted.

Keywords/phrases and codes were placed into themes within each question using an iterative process. The process repeated for each question data set. The final step combined questions of brave space to confirm and generate larger themes within the topics. The open-text responses were then triangulated with the numerical data and situated with the literature.

Result

This study aimed to explore the impact of a structured self-assessment tool, the Engagement Self-Assessment (ESA), on the alignment and creation of a brave space in a nursing ethics course for undergraduate nursing students in Pakistan. The results are presented in two sections: quantitative data analysis and qualitative data analysis.

The quantitative data analysis involved the use of inferential and descriptive statistics to analyze the participants' overall ESA marks and course grades. The results show that the participants' overall ESA marks and course grades were high, indicating that the participants engaged well with the ESA and the nursing ethics course (Table 1).

The qualitative data analysis involved the use of thematic analysis to analyze the participants' responses to the ESA exit questionnaire (Table 2).

The themes and subthemes that emerged from the participant's responses to the ESA exit questionnaire are presented in Table 2. The themes and subthemes are organized based on the research questions and the literature review.

The participants reported that the ESA helped them understand ethics, develop critical thinking skills, and engage in self-reflection. The participants also reported that the ESA helped create a brave space in the classroom, where they felt comfortable sharing their vulnerabilities, engaging in civil discourse, and developing moral courage. The participants also reported that the ESA aligned well with the course content, assessment methods, and classroom environment. The results of the study suggest that the ESA can be an effective tool for nursing ethics education in Pakistan. The ESA can help nursing students develop critical thinking skills, engage in self-reflection, and develop moral courage. The ESA can also help create a brave space in the classroom, where nursing students can engage in civil discourse and share their vulnerabilities. The results also suggest that the ESA aligns well with the course content, assessment methods, and classroom environment, indicating that the ESA is a pedagogical tool that can be used in nursing ethics education in Pakistan.

The findings of this study can help nursing educators in Pakistan foster nurses who can courageously engage in difficult conversations situated in ethics. The study also provides insights into how self-assessment and the use of a brave space in nursing ethics education can facilitate a morally supportive learning space in the Pakistani context.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Overall ESA Mark and Course Grade

Variable	Mean \pm Stand. Dev
Overall ESA Mark	82.5 \pm 5.7
Course Grade	85.3 \pm 4.6

Table 2: Themes and Subthemes of Participants' Responses to the ESA Exit Questionnaire

Theme	Subtheme
Learning	Understanding of Ethics
	Critical Thinking
	Self-Reflection
Brave Space	Shared Vulnerability
	Civil Discourse
	Moral Courage
Alignment	Course Content
	Assessment Methods
	Classroom Environment

Discussion

The findings of this study shed light on the potential of using a structured self-assessment tool, the Engagement Self-Assessment (ESA), to enhance nursing ethics education in Pakistan. The results indicate that the ESA played a significant role in fostering a brave space within the nursing ethics course at Koohi Goth Nursing College. By providing students with opportunities for self-reflection, critical thinking, and engagement in civil discourse, the ESA contributed to the development of moral courage and ethical awareness among the participants⁸.

The high overall ESA marks and course grades suggest that the participants actively engaged with the ESA and the course content, indicating a positive impact on their learning experience. The qualitative analysis revealed themes such as understanding ethics, critical thinking, shared vulnerability, and moral courage, highlighting the transformative potential of the ESA in creating a supportive learning environment conducive to ethical development^{9,10}.

These findings align with previous research that emphasizes the importance of self-assessment tools in promoting reflective practice and ethical decision-making in nursing education^{11,12}. The concept of brave spaces, as evidenced by the participants' experiences in this study, offers a valuable framework for nurturing moral sensitivity and courage among nursing students in Pakistan¹³.

The alignment of the ESA with the participants' definitions of a brave space underscores the tool's effectiveness in facilitating meaningful discussions on ethical dilemmas and promoting a culture of respect, empathy, and openness within the classroom. By integrating the ESA into nursing ethics education, educators can create a supportive learning environment that encourages students to confront ethical challenges with confidence and integrity¹⁴⁻¹⁶.

It is essential to acknowledge the limitations of this study, including the small sample size and the focus on a single institution in Pakistan. Future research could explore the generalizability of these findings across different nursing programs and institutions in Pakistan to further validate the effectiveness of the ESA in promoting ethical development among nursing students.

In conclusion, this study provides valuable insights into the use of self-assessment tools and brave spaces in nursing ethics education in Pakistan. By leveraging the ESA and creating a brave space within the classroom, educators can empower nursing students to navigate complex ethical dilemmas with courage and compassion, ultimately contributing to the cultivation of ethical practitioners who uphold the highest standards of patient care and professional integrity.

Conclusion

This study highlights the importance of self-assessment tools and brave spaces in nursing ethics education in Pakistan. By leveraging the ESA and creating a brave space within the classroom, educators can empower nursing students to navigate complex ethical dilemmas with courage and compassion, ultimately contributing to the development of ethical practitioners who uphold the highest standards of patient care and professional integrity.

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