

Practical Health Education Experiences of Nursing Students: Qualitative Research

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ABSTRACT

Objective: The study aimed to explore the experiences, expectations, and suggestions of undergraduate nursing students regarding a health education seminar on technology addiction.

Method: This is a qualitative descriptive study. A convenience sample of undergraduate nursing students who had organized and actively participated in a health education seminar about Technology Addiction conducted in a public high school in Istanbul was asked to participate in the study. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with six nursing students in the fifth semester of a four-year nursing degree program who were accepted to participate in the study. Thematic content analysis was used.

Results: Two themes; (1) Reflections on the health education seminar and (2) Reflections on the role of nurses as health educators, and seven sub-themes were identified: seminar preparation process, feelings regarding practice as a nurse educator, raising community awareness, preparation for the future, difficulties in working as a group, importance of the nurse's role as an educator and deficiencies in health education in nursing practice.

Conclusion: The health education seminar on technology addiction not only revealed challenges but also had significant positive impacts on the academic and professional development of nursing students. The emphasized positive effects underscore the ongoing importance of innovative educational initiatives that not only address contemporary health challenges but also promote the personal and professional growth of future nurses.

Keywords: Health education, leadership, qualitative research, nursing, students, technology addiction

INTRODUCTION

Nursing is a profession that encompasses various essential functions. Beyond being caregivers, nurses also take on roles as managers, researchers, and educators, all aimed at delivering high-quality care (1). Through the implementation of educational activities, nursing care is enriched by fostering effective information exchange between nurses and the community (2). Consequently, nursing students must cultivate essential skills such as empathy and effective communication to excel in their roles as educators (3). By developing these abilities, they can better engage with diverse audiences and

ensure that health information is disseminated effectively, leading to improved health outcomes and increased community well-being.

Nursing education is a dynamic and systematic process, through which students are educated to care for different populations according to their changes and needs (4). Thus, nursing education is progressive and integrates theoretical and practical activities (5). As in other countries, in Turkey, different teaching methods are used for nursing students to develop the different interpersonal, technical, and conceptual skills needed by nurses (6).

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Nursing students necessitate ongoing preparation to adeptly engage with individuals and communities, assuming a pivotal educational role in advancing health promotion and making significant contributions to the overall well-being of the population. While they acquire andragogy techniques (adult-oriented teaching methods), during theoretical classes, it is in practical classes that students have the opportunity to assess and refine their skills, identifying both their strengths and areas that require development (2, 7, 8). Consequently, a thorough reflection on the experiences of nursing students regarding the methods implemented for the development of these skills is crucial.

Seminars, role-playing, community-based practical activities, and group discussions, among others, are effective pedagogical strategies commonly used to prepare nursing students as health educators (9, 10). Gaining insights from the practical experiences of students as community educators is relevant for improving teaching techniques and, consequently, the nursing curriculum. These opinions provide valuable arguments that can inform adjustments and innovations, aiming for a more effective education aligned with the real needs faced by students during their educational activities within the community.

Nursing students should tackle relevant topics when engaging in public education. Consequently, a variety of subjects can be addressed by these students as they contribute to educating the population. One of these issues is current and worrying; technology addiction is a widely discussed topic for bringing physical and psychosocial harm to the population (11, 12). Based on the aforementioned, this study aimed to explore the experiences, expectations, and suggestions of undergraduate nursing students regarding a health education seminar on technology addiction.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

Design

This study employs a descriptive qualitative design to explore the lived experiences of nursing students in a health education seminar on technology addiction, which they organized and presented to enhance their community education skills. The choice of qualitative research aligns with the complexity of understanding students' perceptions and emotions in depth, emphasizing their roles as emerging educators. Guided by the Consolidated Criteria for Reporting Qualitative research checklist - COREQ (13), this approach enables a contextual examination of social and cultural factors (14), providing valuable insights into practical strategies for effective community education.

Setting and Subjects

The study was carried out at a private university in Istanbul, Turkey. A convenience sample of undergraduate nursing students who had organized and actively participated in a health education seminar about Technology Addiction

conducted in a public high school in Istanbul was asked to participate in the study. The students were in their fifth semester of a four-year nursing degree program. The seminar was an activity that students conducted in the "Education in Nursing" course. For 11 weeks, 17 students organized the seminar, in the 12th week they presented it to the other students in their class under the supervision of an assistant professor and a research assistant. After that, they made some changes in the content and methods used in the seminar according to the recommendations made by the supervisors. In the 14th week, they presented it to approximately 120 students at a high school. Students used diverse teaching methods and techniques such as question-answer, role play, poster presentation, slide projection, and leaflet distribution during the activity. The health education seminar took place in January 2023.

Six of the 17 students agreed to participate in the study. Despite the small number of participants, it is believed that data saturation was reached since the information provided by participants did not present significant differences. Furthermore, it is believed that the sample of six students represented the group researched since the characteristics such as age and gender percentage between those who agreed to participate and those who did not were similar. Four female and two male students aged 20 to 24 years participated in the study. The individual in-depth face-to-face semi-structured interviews were conducted by the second author in March 2023.

Researchers

This study was carried out by three female researchers. The primary author is a Registered Nurse/Assistant Professor, who has a Ph.D. in Nursing Management and holds a certificate in qualitative research methods. The second author is a Registered Nurse/Assistant Professor, who has a Ph.D. in Internal Medicine Nursing. The third author is a Registered Nurse/Research Assistant, who holds a master's degree in surgical nursing.

Data Collection

A pilot test was carried out with one student by the primary author in the presence of the second author to evaluate the data collection tool. Two more questions were added to the interview schedule after the test. The data of this student were not included in the survey. The interviews were conducted at the university by the second author to avoid bias or embarrassment since the seminar was an activity of the course supervised by the primary and third authors. Before performing the interviews, the researcher provided the participants with the purpose and overview of the study. The students already knew the researcher who had been their professor before, which could limit the autonomy of the students, thus, the fact that the student was free to participate or not in the interviews was emphasized by the researcher several times. Only the participant and the researcher were present in the room during the interviews. A semi-structured form with open-ended questions prepared by scanning the literature

(7, 9-11) was used during the interviews. The interviews were conducted in Turkish, each lasting between 30 and 45 minutes. The interviews were tape-recorded with the consent of the participants and transcribed verbatim. Measures were taken to maintain the anonymity of students.

Limitations of the Study

The interviews were carried out approximately two months after the health education seminar, which could generate memory bias, however, the researcher responsible for the interviews asked the participants to reflect deeply on their experiences at the seminar and on their views regarding nurses' roles as educators and technology addiction to reduce recall bias. Another limitation of the study is the fact that students and researchers were from the same educational institution, which, despite the efforts of the researchers, may have impaired the autonomy of the participants. The low number of participants can also be considered a limitation. Nursing students reflected their own opinions about the health education seminar and nurses' roles as educators, therefore, the results of this study cannot be generalized.

Rigor

Credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability are strategies employed in qualitative research to ensure the trustworthiness of the findings (16). The study includes thorough and detailed descriptions of the research context and procedures for data collection, along with a pilot test of the data collection tool. A specific protocol for data collection was implemented. The procedures for data analysis were articulated with clarity and detail, and researchers maintained prolonged engagement with the data. Direct quotations were faithfully included, and the coding, subthemes, and themes underwent multiple evaluations by researchers. Special attention was given to accurately conveying the sentiments and inquiries expressed by the participants.

Ethical Considerations

This study received approval from the Istanbul Esenyurt University Ethics Committee (approval date: 16.03.2023; decision number: 2023/03-13), and permission was obtained from the university where the participants were enrolled. The informed consent form was meticulously explained, and participants voluntarily signed it.

It is essential to note that the interviewers in this study were professors associated with the participants' academic institutions. Recognizing the potential power dynamics inherent in this relationship, steps were taken to mitigate any undue influence. Before the interviews, participants were assured that their participation or responses would not affect their academic standing, and they were reminded of their right to withdraw from the study at any point without consequence. Furthermore, the interviewers maintained a transparent and supportive demeanor, emphasizing the confidential nature of the discussions. Participants were encouraged to express their

thoughts openly and honestly, reassured that their responses would be treated with the utmost confidentiality.

Data Analysis

The thematic content analysis (15) process employed in this study involved several systematic steps to derive meaningful insights from the collected data. After obtaining the textual data, the researchers initiated the analysis by thoroughly reading the texts multiple times to gain familiarity with the content. The next step involved organizing the data based on two main subjects, namely "seminar preparation" and "health education." Within these subjects, the data were systematically arranged by identifying similarities and differences. Subsequently, the researchers applied coding to the organized data, wherein specific codes were assigned to segments of the text that shared commonalities. These codes were then compared and organized into broader categories based on their similarities. To ensure a comprehensive and reliable analysis, the researchers engaged in a thorough process of reviewing and refining the codes, subthemes, and emerging themes through multiple iterations. The analysis also included a validation step by checking the coded data with the participants, seeking their input to ensure that the interpretations accurately reflected their perspectives. This iterative process continued until a consensus was reached among the researchers, enhancing the confirmability and credibility of the identified themes and sub-themes. Themes and sub-themes are presented in Table 1.

RESULTS

The results were categorized into two themes: "reflections on the health education seminar" and "reflections on the role of nurses as health educators." Seven subthemes were identified, each supported by quotations from the participants.

Theme 1. Reflections on the Health Education Seminar

The first theme delves into the experiences, perceptions, and feelings of the students before, during, and after the health education seminar. The theme is presented under five subthemes: (1) Seminar preparation process, (2) Feelings regarding practice as a nurse educator, (3) Raising community awareness, (4) Preparation for the future, and (5) Difficulties in working as a group.

Sub-theme 1.1. Seminar Preparation Process

Students recognized that the period preceding the health education seminar was important for them to get used to the idea and also prepare for the activity through research on technology addiction and teaching methods that could be used during the seminar. Participants toured the school and the amphitheater designated for the seminar, familiarizing themselves with the surroundings and ensuring the proper functioning of all necessary equipment. Additionally, students verified the suitability of the planned teaching methods and techniques for the venue. The quotes below reflect students' concern about adequately preparing for the activity:

“We went to the school where we were going to present the health education seminar the day before and we did a proof. We tested the speakers and the projection equipment. If there were any problems with them, we would solve them, we didn’t leave it for the next day, we didn’t want to have problems. So, we had no problems on the day of the seminar. We were ready” (Participant 1).

“[...] we thought that interactive methods would be more interesting in order not to bore the students. We also thought that the duration should not be too long to maintain a more pleasant educational environment for us and them, we made a plan thinking about all this” (Participant 2).

Sub-theme 1.2. Feelings Regarding Practice as a Nurse Educator

Participants reported that at first, they felt anxious and even confused when they were told by the professor that they would be responsible for organizing and running a health education seminar for teenagers in a high school. However, with the course of the activity and when they fell into the role of health educators, positive feelings emerged, and the attention, respect, and self-esteem of the listeners relaxed them, making the activity fun and pleasant, as well as efficient. The quotes below report the various feelings of students regarding the health education seminar:

“At first you think, what does nursing have to do with technology addiction? But then you understand that the subject is associated with health. [...] It was great doing research (to prepare for the seminar). I had a great time. I really enjoyed it, especially while preparing for the seminar. [...] when the students started to arrive and the conference room became crowded, there was anxiety. Other than that, I had no problems, as I said this type of anxiety is normal. Then, the students made us feel very comfortable” (Participant 1).

“I noticed that the interest of teenagers in high school and their self-esteem is very high, it made me happy. [...] I was a little nervous, but the way they spoke and respected us made me feel relieved” (Participant 5).

One student reported that in addition to feeling comfortable and having fun during the presentation, the health education seminar also promoted unity among group colleagues. The statement below reflects on the importance of encouraging teamwork:

“Going to a high school and performing in front of people we didn’t know caused me some anxiety, frankly, even in the proofs I was anxious. The proof environment was tense. But after a while, I started to feel a little more relaxed. [...] In the seminar itself, I had fun because I felt more comfortable, it wasn’t as tense as I expected. This activity also helped me to improve relationships with my classmates” (Participant 4).

Sub-theme 1.3. Raising Community Awareness

According to the students, engaging in an activity focused on disease prevention was rewarding, and it allowed them to practically realize the importance of nursing in promoting community health through education. Participants emphasized the significance of diverse and ongoing educational activities to prepare them for the role of educators. The following quotes report the students’ satisfaction in response to the positive reactions from the seminar audience:

“I had no idea about the nurse’s role as an educator when I chose the profession [...] I learned during graduation that nurses have educator functions [...] During the health education seminar I felt good about teaching something to the students and raising their awareness. I felt useful” (Participant 3).

“The students really listened to us carefully [...] they really understood what we wanted to teach” (Participant 6).

Sub-theme 1.4. Preparation for the Future

Students reported that the health education seminar represented a valuable experience, providing preparation for other activities where they may need to engage with a large audience and deliver oral presentations. In other words, organizing and running an educational seminar for the community was an important experience to prepare them for the future as educators. The quote below reflects the importance of communication skills for nurses to carry out their functions effectively and efficiently:

“It was very good to communicate with young people [...]. That was really good, teaching the teenagers... This experience prepared me for my future professional life, now I know how to address myself to people and how I will feel during oral presentations” (Participant 1).

Participants also identified the importance of learning the appropriate methods to communicate with the population,

Table 1: Themes and sub-themes

Themes	Sub-themes
Reflections on the health education seminar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Seminar preparation process -Feelings regarding practice as a nurse educator -Raising community awareness -Preparation for the future -Difficulties in working as a group
Reflections on the role of nurses as health educators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Importance of the nurse’s role as an educator -Deficiencies in health education in nursing practice

emphasizing that it is important not only to provide information but also to exchange knowledge with the community, approaching individuals so that they can absorb the knowledge needed to generate awareness. The following quote reflects the need for nurses to research and share knowledge with the community:

“Being part of a group giving health education obviously added a lot to me. [...] Before, I thought it was just getting there and talking, but I learned that it’s important to choose words and speak in a way that people can understand, I have learned to speak like a nurse. [...] I think this experience gave us responsibility” (Participant 6).

Sub-theme 1.5. Difficulties in Working as a Group

Despite all the positive aspects highlighted by the students regarding the conducted activity, all six participants mentioned difficulties regarding teamwork. Working in a group means having to face various obstacles. The challenges of leading, delegating tasks, and making decisions were reported by the participants. The importance of having a common goal when working in a group was emphasized in several narratives. The quotes below report the difficulties that arose during the process of organizing the health education seminar since many individuals formed the working group:

“We were a very large group, the distribution of tasks was a little difficult, it was very difficult to prepare the content, as everyone’s opinion might not be the same [...] I mean, many times I got nervous (during seminar preparation)” (Participant 3).

“We spent a lot of time on the health education seminar preparation process. It was difficult to rehearse with such a large group. Most often some colleagues could not come to proofs. I couldn’t attend a proof myself. The seminar preparation process was a bit complicated” (Participant 4).

Theme 2. Reflections on the Role of Nurses as Health Educators

The second theme is focused on the students’ reflections regarding the important role of nurses as health educators. The participants acknowledged that the experience of preparing a health education seminar made them more observant and critical of the nurse’s role as an educator. The theme is divided into two subthemes: (1) the Importance of the nurse’s role as an educator and (2) the Deficiencies of health education in nursing practice.

Sub-theme 2.1. Importance of the Nurse’s Role as an Educator

Based on the health education seminar, students reflected on the role of nurses in educating the population. According to the students, nurses should exercise more of their roles as health educators. They stated that there is a need to better prepare nursing students to be educators, thus contributing to the well-being of the community. The seminar played a crucial role in heightening students’ awareness of the nursing

profession’s vital contribution to raising public consciousness. According to them, this consciousness should be achieved through the sharing of knowledge on various topics related to health and the disease process. The quotes below address the importance of nursing for disease prevention and community health promotion:

“Health education is important; we have to give more importance to these things because patients need to be aware to promote and protect their own health. It’s very important. Yes, before the disease happens, the most important thing is to prevent it, to do something before the disease happens. The population needs to be made aware” (Participant 3).

“I think nurses could go further, research more. I think we can add good things to the health of the community in all areas [...] It is important to raise awareness among the population. It is in our hands to raise awareness among the population through our role as educators” (Participant 5).

Sub-theme 2.2. Deficiencies of Health Education in Nursing Practice

The activity developed by the students made them reflect on the way health education should be shared with the community. The deficiencies of the health sector were emphasized by the participants as they observed during clinical placements in varied health institutions that nurses do not actively exercise their functions as educators. According to students, nurses are limited to giving basic information very quickly, which cannot be considered health education, since they are not an in-depth exchange of knowledge, and they are not capable of generating changes in people’s habits. The quotes below are about situations that came to the minds of the participants after the seminar, which allowed them to make comparisons between the activity carried out by them and how health education can be deficient in health institutions:

“During clinical placements, I came across a nurse guiding a patient about breastfeeding, but the communication between the nurse and the patient took only 30 seconds or a minute. That is, it did not even reach 2 minutes, her approach was very bad. She walked straight into the room, squeezed the patient’s breast, and just said it was ok” (Participant 1).

“In clinical placements, I did not come across nurses exercising the role of educator. Maybe they teach patients, but I haven’t seen it [...] Only during patient discharge do they teach something” (Participant 3).

DISCUSSION

This study aimed to explore the experiences, expectations, and suggestions of undergraduate nursing students regarding a health education seminar on technology addiction. Students recognized the importance of planning their activities in detail to avoid unexpected complications. Anxiety and stress during the preparation of the seminar were reported by the participants, but during and after the activity, feelings such

as pride, happiness, and accomplishment of duty stood out. According to the students, the health education seminar allowed them to provide information about technology addiction as they became aware of the importance of the topic. In addition, difficulties in working in groups were identified. The students emphasized that the nurse's role as an educator is very important for the well-being of the community, however, deficiencies related to the interaction with patients and their families during nursing practices were also reported.

For nursing students to be prepared to perform their functions as educators, they need to receive theoretical and practical education (17). Practical classes, in which nursing students can share knowledge about health and illness with the population, are included in the nursing curriculum and are characterized by detailed planning of the activity to be carried out (10). In a study conducted in Brazil, the use of ludic activities, such as theatrical presentations to attract the attention of the population during health education, was identified as a widely used method that generates good results for both students and the community (10). A study carried out in Australia emphasized that skills related to planning routines, teamwork, active communication, and cultural competence are some of the abilities needed by newly graduated nurses (18). Based on the narratives of the participants in the present study, it is believed that the systematic and continuous implementation of activities such as lectures and seminars help students develop such skills and should be continuously encouraged in nursing schools.

A document developed by the World Health Organization (WHO) highlights that nurses must play their role as educators and effective communicators to enable individuals to be active agents of their health-disease processes (19). This information is in line with the findings of the present study since mainly interpersonal skills related to communication with colleagues and the community were identified by the participants as essential for nurses to be efficient educators. In addition, participants stated that during the health education activity, they were able to better understand the role of nurses as an important agent for raising awareness of the population.

Students who participated in the present study reported they felt anxiety and stress during the preparation and in the minutes that preceded the health education seminar. Such symptoms at moderate levels are common in nursing students, especially before or during practical activities (20, 21). Professors and instructors who supervise such practical courses are responsible for supporting and empowering students so that they feel happy and fulfilled during their practical nursing activities (20).

Participants of the present study also stated it was difficult to work as a group, especially because it was a group composed of many individuals. This is a concerning fact, since in addition to the role of educator, the nurse also has a role as manager and leads and coordinates nursing and multidisciplinary teams (1). Therefore, nurses need to acquire skills to work in groups

and lead people. It is important to emphasize that the group of students in question started their undergraduate nursing education during the COVID-19 pandemic, which prevented group activities. The participants' reflections reinforce the importance of teaching nursing in face-to-face classes in which group activities are continuously developed.

Another noteworthy finding is that participants, following the seminar, were able to draw comparisons with the health education practices provided by nurses in the healthcare institutions where they conducted their clinical placements. They identified a deficiency in this area and emphasized the need for improvement. Nurses face several obstacles that prevent them from planning and carrying out activities aimed at the health education of the population. The lack of time to teach is identified by nurses as one of the most common barriers to effective health education. The insufficient knowledge to develop such activities is also cited by nurses as an obstacle, which intensifies the need to better prepare undergraduate students for the role of health educators (17).

Administrators of educational and health institutions, professors, and instructors have the important role of enabling nursing students to perform all their functions efficiently. Practical activities, developed in groups, in which students interact with each other, planning, coordinating, and executing activities aimed at the community through diversified teaching methods should be increasingly incorporated into nursing curricula. Thus, during external activities, the use of interactive and alternative methods, where nursing students are not limited to the clinical model, focused on the biological and individual dimension, but are capable of focusing on disease prevention and health promotion, should be increasingly encouraged in educational institutions (10). In addition, through activities such as seminars, students can also learn to use different teaching techniques to communicate with multiple communities (9).

Concerning the exaggerated or inappropriate use of technologies; the participants recognized the need to inform the population about the subject. The problematic use of technology can generate physical disorders such as postural problems and obesity (22) and psychosocial disorders such as anxiety and depression (23). This and many other subjects can be addressed by nursing students and nurses during the health education of the population.

Practical activities in which students can interact with the community and exercise the role of health educators using creative, innovative, and interactive teaching methods should be increasingly encouraged in educational and health institutions responsible for educating future nurses. Educating individuals and communities about healthy lifestyles is one of the important functions of nurses.

CONCLUSION

This study sheds light on nursing students' diverse experiences of conducting a health education seminar on technology

addiction. The identified challenges, ranging from initial anxiety to the complexities of group work, underscore the need for more comprehensive and practical approaches in nursing education. As we navigate an era marked by technological advancements and unforeseen disruptions, the findings advocate for the continued integration of face-to-face education and dynamic group activities. The role of nurses as educators and leaders in health promotion becomes pivotal, necessitating not only the acquisition of technical skills but also the fostering of effective interpersonal communication.

It is imperative for nursing curricula to adapt, equipping students with the tools and competencies required to meet the evolving demands of healthcare. This study invites educators, administrators, and policymakers to reflect on and refine educational strategies, ensuring that nursing students are not only well-prepared professionals but also empathetic educators capable of addressing contemporary health challenges within their communities. Special attention must be given to the group of students educated during the COVID-19 pandemic, in which distance classes have become mandatory because nursing is a theoretical-practical science that cannot be taught without face-to-face and group activities.

Additionally, it is crucial to highlight that the seminar on technology addiction not only revealed challenges but also had significant positive impacts on the academic and professional development of nursing students. The emphasized positive effects underscore the ongoing importance of innovative educational initiatives that not only address contemporary health challenges but also promote the personal and professional growth of future nurses.

Ethics Committee Approval: This study was approved by the ethics committee of Istanbul Esenyurt University (approval date: 16.03.2023; decision number: 2023/03-13)

Informed Consent: Written consent was obtained from the participants.

Peer Review: Externally peer-reviewed.

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