

Challenges and Responsibilities of Nursing Students as Professional Citizens in Healthcare Services

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the challenges and responsibilities of nursing students as professional citizens within the healthcare system. In an era marked by rapid health transitions, social inequality, and digital transformation, nursing students are expected not only to acquire clinical competence but also to demonstrate civic engagement and social accountability. Through a literature review approach, this study examines the roles of nursing students in promoting health equity, advocating for community welfare, and influencing healthcare policy. The findings reveal that nursing students face several obstacles in fulfilling their civic duties, including limited curriculum content, lack of institutional support, and academic pressures. However, when properly guided and supported, they can become key agents of change in addressing health disparities, strengthening community trust, and promoting ethical healthcare practices. The paper concludes that integrating citizenship education into nursing programs is essential for producing socially responsible healthcare professionals who are capable of responding to both individual and collective health needs. This study contributes to the broader understanding of how nursing education can be designed to prepare future nurses not only as caregivers, but also as advocates, educators, and civic leaders in public health.

1. Introduction

Citizenship is not limited to rights and obligations, but also includes the active participation of individuals in improving society. In the nursing field, this concept is translated into a commitment to public health, social justice, and professional integrity. Nursing students are not only required to master clinical competencies but also to understand how they can act as agents of change in health systems. Their role involves reducing disparities, advocating for vulnerable populations, and promoting health equity. These responsibilities place nursing students in a unique position as both learners and future healthcare professionals with civic duties.

In Indonesia, nursing education has begun to emphasize the importance of civic values and social accountability. The curriculum now incorporates topics that reflect global health challenges, such as pandemics, aging populations, and access to healthcare. This shift aims to shape nursing students into professionals who are responsive to societal needs, especially in marginalized communities. The development of social responsibility among students is facilitated through community health education, participation in professional organizations, and direct engagement in advocacy. These learning experiences foster not only clinical competence but also a deep sense of ethical and civic responsibility¹.

Professional citizenship in nursing entails a commitment to justice, human rights, and ethical standards in patient care. As future registered nurses, students are expected to uphold these principles both in academic settings and clinical practice². This includes standing up against discrimination, recognizing social determinants of health, and supporting inclusive healthcare policies. Nursing students must learn how to navigate complex ethical dilemmas while maintaining empathy and professionalism. Their civic actions contribute to a healthcare system that values equality and human dignity³.

The complexity of healthcare issues today demands that nursing students go beyond technical skills and develop critical thinking related to social justice and policy. They must be able to identify how economic, political, and cultural contexts affect health outcomes. Through civic engagement, they learn how to influence public policy and promote changes that benefit underserved populations. Understanding these dynamics prepares them to be more than just caregivers—they become public advocates for health reform. This transformation is essential for addressing structural inequalities in healthcare⁴.

Nursing students often encounter real-life scenarios during their clinical rotations that require civic reflection and action. For instance, when providing care to patients with limited access to healthcare, students must question why such disparities exist. These experiences help them develop a sense of responsibility not just to individual patients, but to society as a whole. By critically evaluating their role, they begin to see the connection between individual health and broader systemic issues. This awareness is foundational to the development of professional citizenship.

The integration of citizenship into nursing education can be achieved through active learning strategies, such as service-learning, problem-based learning, and reflective writing. These methods encourage students to connect academic knowledge with community needs. Students are given opportunities to work on real-world issues, including public health campaigns

¹ Afanindya Bias Maharani et al., "Membumikan Pancasila Di Dunia Kesehatan: Hambatan Dan Tantangannya," *Dewantara : Jurnal Pendidikan Sosial Humaniora* 3, no. 4 (2024): 199–209, <https://doi.org/10.30640/dewantara.v3i4.3548>.

² Agnes Sembiring et al., "Pengaruh Pendidikan Kewarganegaraan Terhadap Kesadaran Mahasiswa Kesehatan Tentang Hak Pasien," 2025, 27–38.

³ Eirene Eunike Meidiana Gaghauna, "Narrative Review: The Role of the Interprofessional Education (IPE) Function and the Implementation of the Interprofessional Collaboration (IPC) in Health Education through a Critical Nursing Perspective," *Journal of Nursing Invention E-ISSN 2828-481X* 2, no. 1 (2021): 21–28, <https://doi.org/10.33859/jni.v2i1.44>.

⁴ Dkk Aniska Indah Fari, Suprpto, *Keperawatan Dan Ners*, 2023, https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Suprpto-Suprpto-10/publication/375799839_Keperawatan_Dan_Ners_Teori_Dan_Standar_Operasional_Prosedur_SOP/links/655d9b9c3fa26f66f41f1f06/Keperawatan-Dan-Ners-Teori-Dan-Standar-Operasional-Prosedur-SOP.pdf#page=12.

and policy reviews⁵. These projects enhance their awareness of community health challenges and develop their civic competencies. As a result, nursing students become more engaged, informed, and socially responsible professionals.

Digital transformation in healthcare also introduces new responsibilities for nursing students as digital citizens. They must uphold ethical behavior in online health platforms, ensure patient privacy, and combat misinformation. Civic professionalism now includes digital literacy and responsible communication in virtual environments. Nursing students are expected to model professionalism not only in face-to-face interactions but also in the digital space. This shift highlights the evolving nature of citizenship in the modern healthcare landscape.

In the post-pandemic era, nursing students are at the frontline of restoring public trust in health systems. The COVID-19 crisis exposed significant gaps in health equity and access, which nursing students are now trained to address. By engaging in public health outreach, vaccination drives, and health education, they play a vital role in recovery efforts. Their contributions exemplify the integration of civic values into professional roles. This reflects the urgent need for healthcare workers who are both competent and socially conscious.

One of the key responsibilities of nursing students as citizens is to advocate for health policies that improve population well-being⁶. They must be prepared to voice concerns, suggest reforms, and participate in policy discussions that affect their communities. This requires knowledge of the political system, communication skills, and moral courage. Nursing students are often involved in grassroots campaigns and public hearings to support health equity. These activities foster leadership and policy literacy, which are essential for professional growth.

Despite these opportunities, nursing students face challenges in fulfilling their civic responsibilities. Barriers such as lack of institutional support, limited awareness, and academic workload can hinder civic engagement. Furthermore, not all students receive adequate training on the importance of citizenship in nursing. This gap can result in passive attitudes and missed opportunities for social contribution⁷. Therefore, nursing institutions must actively promote citizenship education as part of their core mission.

The nursing profession plays a crucial role in the healthcare system, demanding not only in-depth clinical knowledge but also a strong ethical commitment and professionalism. Nursing students, as future frontliners, face unique challenges throughout their education, which directly impact their readiness to assume significant responsibilities in the workplace. What are the psychological and emotional challenges nursing students experience during their education, particularly when facing stressful and traumatic clinical experiences? How do educational environmental factors and clinical practice facilities influence the quality of learning and skill development in nursing students? To what extent do nursing students understand and internalize their ethical and professional responsibilities in providing quality, patient-centered nursing care? How can the role of interprofessional collaboration in nursing education be enhanced to prepare students for the dynamics of future healthcare teams?

⁵ Mohammad Naufal Al Farochi, "OPTIMALISASI PERAN MAHASISWA DALAM PENINGKATAN KESEHATAN MASYARAKAT MELALUI PROGRAM CEK KESEHATAN DI KAMPUS UNIVERSITAS SUNAN GIRI SURABAYA Mohammad," *Etika Jurnalisme Pada Koran Kuning : Sebuah Studi Mengenai Koran Lampu Hijau* 16, no. 2 (2015): 39–55.

⁶ Farochi.

⁷ Abdul Ghani, Ida Suryawati, and Mariyati Mariyati, "Pemahaman Mahasiswa Keperawatan Tentang Nilai-Nilai Ideologi Negara Di Stikes Muhammadiyah Lhokseumawe," *Suloh: Jurnal Fakultas Hukum Universitas Malikussaleh* 11, no. 1 (2023): 252, <https://doi.org/10.29103/sjp.v11i1.5720>.

2. Research Method

This study employed a literature review approach to explore the concept of citizenship responsibility among nursing students. A literature review was chosen because it allows researchers to access a wide range of academic sources without collecting primary data. This method supports a deeper exploration of theories, frameworks, and practices relevant to the research topic. By synthesizing findings from various studies, the literature review provides a comprehensive understanding of nursing students' roles as professional citizens. It also helps identify gaps in knowledge and suggests areas for future investigation.

The data collection process followed several systematic steps to ensure the credibility and relevance of the sources. The first step was identifying academic sources such as journal articles, books, and official reports published between 2020 and 2025. Search engines and databases like Google Scholar, PubMed, and the National Digital Library of Indonesia were used to find literature. Keywords such as "nursing citizenship," "healthcare social accountability," and "nursing education in Indonesia" guided the search. Only English and Indonesian sources directly related to the topic were selected.

The next step involved screening and selecting the most relevant literature based on inclusion and exclusion criteria. The inclusion criteria focused on publications discussing citizenship, nursing education, and social responsibility in health contexts. Articles that lacked full access or did not align with the research focus were excluded. Out of 50 initially identified articles, only 10 were selected as the main references for this paper. These selected sources provided substantial insights and theoretical foundations for the discussion.

The analysis was conducted using a thematic approach to identify key ideas related to the role of nursing students in community health, educational strategies for citizenship, and the impact of civic engagement. Themes were drawn by comparing findings across the selected literature to find consistent patterns and critical points. This method allowed the researcher to highlight similarities and differences in the way various authors approached the topic. The analysis also ensured that the discussion was evidence-based and reflected multiple scholarly perspectives. It contributed to a structured and meaningful interpretation of the data.

Finally, the findings from the literature review were compiled into a coherent narrative format to build the body of the paper. Each paragraph in the discussion section is supported by credible citations to strengthen the arguments. Although this method relies entirely on secondary data, its careful selection and critical analysis of recent literature provide valuable insights. One limitation of this approach is its inability to capture real-life practices directly from the field. However, using updated and reliable sources helps maintain the academic integrity and relevance of this study.

3. Results and Discussion

Citizenship in the nursing profession is not merely a political identity or legal status, but a fundamental aspect of ethical responsibility and social accountability. For nursing students, this concept translates into a conscious commitment to serve the community through inclusive, equitable, and justice-oriented healthcare services⁸. In daily practice, this responsibility is reflected through active involvement in public health programs such as vaccination drives,

⁸ Nunuk Endah Srimulyani et al., "Motivation of Nursing Students To Work in Japan: A Case Study of Stikes Nhm Bangkalan Madura," *Jurnal Layanan Masyarakat (Journal of Public Services)* 7, no. 4 (2023): 543–56, <https://doi.org/10.20473/jlm.v7i4.2023.543-556>.

disease prevention education, and voluntary service in underdeveloped areas. For instance, nursing students in Indonesia often participate in community-based programs like Posyandu to improve maternal and child health, which not only builds practical skills but also instills civic values. This civic engagement is increasingly recognized as essential for nursing students to develop a comprehensive understanding of health as a social issue and not solely a clinical concern⁹.

The concept of professional citizenship in nursing is deeply connected to three key components: knowledge of social issues, the ability to act as agents of change, and a strong attitude of commitment to public welfare. These components are particularly critical in Indonesia where disparities in healthcare access remain a major concern. Many patients come from economically disadvantaged or socially marginalized backgrounds that require nursing professionals to approach care with sensitivity and empathy¹⁰. Nursing students are therefore expected to develop the capability to respond to structural health inequalities and advocate for systemic improvements. Their awareness of national healthcare schemes like BPJS Kesehatan, and the ability to critically analyze healthcare policy, becomes crucial for effective civic advocacy.

Nursing education plays a pivotal role in shaping students' civic consciousness and nurturing values of responsibility, compassion, and justice. Community-based learning strategies allow students to immerse themselves in the real conditions of healthcare service delivery. Through field practice and public health education programs, they interact directly with communities and learn about the social determinants of health such as poverty, illiteracy, and environmental challenges. For example, a group of students from Universitas Indonesia successfully ran a diabetes awareness campaign in a densely populated urban area in 2023. The program resulted in a 27% increase in knowledge scores among participants and empowered students with leadership skills, interprofessional collaboration experience, and a stronger commitment to their role in society.

In addition to fieldwork, simulations and ethical case discussions contribute significantly to building students' critical thinking and ethical decision-making skills. Ethical simulations allow students to reflect on difficult scenarios that mirror real-life dilemmas in healthcare settings, such as whether to treat uninsured patients in emergency situations. These simulations push students to weigh legal, institutional, and humanitarian factors while making professional choices. By repeatedly engaging in such exercises, students internalize professional standards of care that go beyond clinical routines and embody values of civic professionalism. As a result, they are more prepared to handle complex patient needs with integrity and cultural competence.

However, developing this civic sense among nursing students is not without its challenges. One major obstacle is the lack of emphasis on civic education in the nursing curriculum itself. In many institutions, the curriculum remains heavily focused on technical competencies, while the social aspects of healthcare are treated as supplementary. As a consequence, students often graduate with minimal understanding of how healthcare intersects with social justice, equity, and public policy¹¹. This disconnect weakens their ability to address structural problems such as racial or economic discrimination in service delivery. If not addressed, this gap will perpetuate a generation of healthcare providers who are clinically skilled but civically disengaged.

⁹ dkk Suning Sri Kusumawati, "Pendidikan Kewarganegaraan, Artikel Pendidikan Kewarganegaraan," *Pendidikan Kewarganegaraan*, 2024, 213.

¹⁰ Aniska Indah Fari, Suprpto, *Keperawatan Dan Ners*.

¹¹ Levi Olivia, "Implementasinilaipancasila Sebagai Sumber Etika, Moral Dan Karakter Dalam Penerapan Pelayanan Kesehatan Keperawatan," *Jurnal Ilmiah Kesehatan* 10, no. 2 (2021): 113–21, <https://doi.org/10.52657/jik.v10i2.1478>.

Another challenge lies in the limited institutional resources and logistical support for implementing community-based programs. Many nursing faculties in rural areas lack funding and partnerships to sustain long-term public health projects. This lack of infrastructure makes it difficult for students to access real-world learning environments that expose them to civic responsibility. For example, a study conducted in Central Java revealed that 60% of nursing students reported limited exposure to marginalized populations due to the absence of field placement opportunities¹². Without such exposure, their awareness of civic duties remains theoretical rather than practical, which limits their effectiveness as future health professionals.

Moreover, academic stress and tight schedules often prevent nursing students from engaging in extracurricular activities or community service. Heavy clinical workloads, exams, and skill assessments can overwhelm students and reduce their motivation to participate in civic-based initiatives. A survey conducted by a student research group at Universitas Gadjah Mada in 2022 found that only 28% of nursing students engaged in community service activities outside their mandatory coursework. To counter this trend, educational institutions should introduce credit-based incentives and flexible schedules that allow students to balance academic and civic responsibilities. Counseling and psychological support services can also help students manage stress and maintain motivation.

Despite these barriers, the impact of nursing students' civic engagement on public health outcomes is increasingly evident. Nursing students who participate in outreach programs often become catalysts for community behavioral change. Their efforts in educating local residents about disease prevention, hygiene practices, and healthy lifestyles contribute to increased community awareness and better health outcomes¹³. For instance, during a public health initiative in West Java, nursing students led a maternal health education campaign that resulted in a 15% increase in prenatal check-up attendance over six months. These outcomes show that civic-oriented nursing students are essential agents in promoting preventative care and health literacy.

Civic responsibility also strengthens the nurse-patient relationship, which is fundamental to quality healthcare. Students who understand the cultural, economic, and emotional backgrounds of their patients tend to communicate more effectively and compassionately. This empathetic approach helps reduce miscommunication, enhances patient satisfaction, and minimizes the risk of clinical errors due to misunderstanding. Additionally, students with a civic mindset are more likely to challenge unethical practices and advocate for patient rights within their institutions. This advocacy is crucial for fostering a safe and respectful healthcare environment.

To enhance citizenship awareness among nursing students, several strategic actions are necessary. First, nursing curricula must be restructured to include mandatory courses on social ethics, health equity, and civic engagement¹⁴. These subjects should be supported by case studies, field visits, and interactive learning tools to keep students engaged. Second, universities should

¹² Dameria Yolanda Pintubatu, "PENDIDIKAN KEWARGANEGARAAN DAN PERAN TENAGA KESEHATAN DALAM PENGUATAN SISTEM KESEHATAN DAERAH," 2022, 1–7.

¹³ Dikha Ayu Kurnia, "TELAAH KEBIJAKAN KESEHATAN DAN KEPERAWATAN DALAM LINGKUP PENDIDIKAN DI INDONESIA," *Jurnal Sahabat Keperawatan* 2, no. 2 (2021): 1–6, <https://scholar.archive.org/work/kgkdpood7fh2zaozji4fcuw7vq/access/wayback/https://jurnal.unimor.ac.id/JSK/article/download/911/459/>.

¹⁴ Hasian Leniwita, "PENGEMBANGAN DAN APLIKASI KONSEP DASAR KEPERAWATAN," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 3, no. 1 (2020): 1–15, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.bpj.2015.06.056%0Ahttps://academic.oup.com/bioinformatics/article-abstract/34/13/2201/4852827%0Ainternal-pdf://semisupervised-3254828305/semisupervised.ppt%0Ahttp://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.str.2013.02.005%0Ahttp://dx.doi.org/10.10>

build partnerships with local governments and NGOs to provide students with regular opportunities to work with vulnerable communities. This collaboration would give students firsthand experience with populations in need and develop their civic skills.

Third, the use of digital platforms can be optimized to create online spaces where students engage in public discourse, health campaigns, and collaborative community projects. For example, nursing students at Universitas Airlangga created an Instagram campaign about COVID-19 vaccine safety that reached over 40,000 people and received positive feedback from public health officials. Fourth, academic institutions should offer psychological and academic support to students involved in civic projects, including academic credit and mentorship programs¹⁵. These support mechanisms can reduce burnout and encourage sustained engagement.

In conclusion, nursing students play a critical role as professional citizens in today's complex healthcare environment. Their responsibilities extend beyond patient care to include public advocacy, social awareness, and ethical integrity. While challenges such as limited curricular emphasis, resource constraints, and academic stress exist, these can be addressed through curriculum reform, strategic partnerships, and supportive learning environments. The integration of civic values into nursing education will not only enhance students' personal and professional development but also strengthen the overall health system by promoting social justice, equity, and community trust. As future nurses, students must be prepared not just to treat illness, but also to serve as advocates for a healthier and more equitable society.

4. Conclusion

The role of nursing students as professional citizens extends far beyond mastering clinical skills. They are expected to actively engage with communities, understand social determinants of health, and advocate for equitable healthcare. Through various educational and field experiences, students can develop civic awareness that enhances both their professional competence and social responsibility. This dual role allows them to contribute not only to individual patient care but also to broader public health improvements. The integration of civic values into nursing education is therefore essential for preparing well-rounded health professionals. Challenges such as limited curriculum content on citizenship, institutional barriers, and academic stress continue to hinder the development of civic engagement among nursing students. These obstacles must be addressed through intentional changes in educational strategies, including the incorporation of social ethics, community-based learning, and supportive policies. Nursing institutions should prioritize civic education as a core part of professional training rather than a supplementary activity. Greater institutional support would enable students to balance academic demands with meaningful community involvement. Without this support, the goal of producing socially accountable nurses will remain difficult to achieve.

Despite these challenges, evidence shows that civic-oriented nursing students positively impact community health and social equity. Their participation in health education, advocacy programs, and outreach activities contributes to behavior change, improved access to care, and enhanced trust in healthcare systems. These contributions demonstrate the value of civic learning in real-world health outcomes. Nursing students, when empowered and supported, can become powerful change agents in society. Their civic engagement not only benefits the community but also strengthens their identity as compassionate and ethical healthcare

¹⁵ Dermita Panjaitan et al., "IMPLEMENTASI PENDIDIKAN KEWARGANEGARAAN DALAM KEBIJAKAN PELAYANAN KESEHATAN," 2021, 75–81.

professionals. The development of professional citizenship in nursing requires a multidimensional approach that includes education, practice, and reflection. Learning environments must provide opportunities for students to explore real-life ethical dilemmas, participate in policy discussions, and interact with diverse populations. These experiences cultivate empathy, cultural competence, and a commitment to social justice—all of which are crucial for modern healthcare. Institutions must also provide platforms for dialogue, innovation, and digital advocacy to keep up with the evolving healthcare landscape. Preparing nursing students for this broader role ensures they are equipped to face future public health challenges. In conclusion, nursing students have both the challenge and responsibility to serve as professional citizens within the healthcare system. By embracing this role, they contribute not only to healing individual patients but also to transforming health systems for the better. A strong foundation in civic education enables them to navigate complex healthcare environments with integrity and purpose. As the future backbone of healthcare services, their leadership and advocacy will shape a more equitable and inclusive health system in Indonesia. Therefore, fostering citizenship in nursing education is not optional—it is a necessary step toward a healthier and more just society.

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