

Enhancing Ethical Awareness Among Nursing Students in the Digital Age to Prevent Code Violations

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ABSTRACT

The rapid advancement of digital technology in healthcare has transformed the way nursing students access information, communicate, and practice clinically. While digitalization offers numerous benefits, it also introduces ethical challenges related to confidentiality, professionalism, and online conduct. This study explores the role of ethical education in helping nursing students prevent ethical code violations in the digital era. A qualitative descriptive approach was used, with data collected from 15 nursing students through semi-structured interviews and document analysis. The findings indicate that ethical education enhances students' ethical reasoning, digital responsibility, and awareness of legal implications. Participants reported that ethical education enabled them to critically reflect on their actions, particularly in online environments where ethical boundaries are often ambiguous. The study emphasizes the importance of integrating ethical values continuously throughout the nursing curriculum, rather than treating it as a standalone course. Key factors such as institutional support, curriculum relevance, and educator role modeling were identified as essential in promoting ethical behavior. The results underscore the need for enhanced ethical education in nursing programs to ensure that graduates are not only clinically proficient but also ethically responsible in their digital and professional interactions.

1. Introduction

In the current era of digitalization, technological advancements have significantly reshaped various aspects of life, including the field of health education¹. Nursing students, as future healthcare professionals, are increasingly relying on digital tools to assist in their learning, patient

¹ Jennie C. De Gagne, Hyeyoung Hwang, and Dukyoo Jung, 'Cyberethics in Nursing Education: Ethical Implications of Artificial Intelligence', *Nursing Ethics*, 31.6 (2024) <<https://doi.org/10.1177/09697330231201901>>.

care, and communication². While these technological innovations provide vast opportunities for growth and efficiency, they also introduce new ethical challenges³. The easy access to and dissemination of information online can inadvertently lead to violations of ethical standards, especially when students engage in digital environments without proper understanding of the risks involved⁴. As a result, it is essential for nursing students to develop a comprehensive understanding of ethical behavior in both traditional and digital spaces⁵.

Civic education plays a crucial role in shaping individuals who are responsible, ethical, and law-abiding in all aspects of life. For nursing students, this education extends beyond an understanding of political systems and human rights; it encompasses values such as discipline, accountability, and empathy, which are critical for professional practice⁶. These values guide students in upholding the rights of patients, ensuring that nursing practice respects social norms, and preventing misconduct in digital settings⁷. By integrating civic education into the nursing curriculum, students are better equipped to become professionals who uphold ethical codes both in real-world interactions and online.

The increasing use of digital tools in nursing education and practice brings both opportunities and challenges in maintaining ethical conduct⁸. Nursing students are frequently exposed to social media, digital patient records, and online communication platforms as part of their training⁹. However, without a strong foundation in ethics, students may unknowingly engage in behavior that violates professional guidelines, such as disclosing patient information without consent or spreading inaccurate health information. Civic education can address these issues by fostering a sense of professional responsibility and guiding students in understanding the ethical implications of their online actions¹⁰.

A critical goal of civic education is to ensure that individuals respect ethical guidelines and the rule of law in all facets of life, including their professional practices. For nursing students, this means adhering to ethical principles such as respect for human dignity, confidentiality, and accountability. These principles must be extended to their digital behavior, as the boundaries between professional and personal conduct can be easily blurred online. Civic education encourages students to reflect critically on their actions and decisions, particularly when

² Ulla-Mari Kinnunen and others, 'Nurses' Informatics Competency Assessment of Health Information System Usage', *CIN: Computers, Informatics, Nursing*, 41.11 (2023), 869–76 <<https://doi.org/10.1097/CIN.0000000000001026>>.

³ A. Demiray and others, 'Social Media Use and Ethics Violations: Nurses' Responses to Hypothetical Cases', *International Nursing Review*, 67.1 (2020), 84–91 <<https://doi.org/10.1111/inr.12563>>.

⁴ Emi Yoshioka and Sayuri Kaneko, 'The Current Status of Ethical Judgment Capacity and Ethical Training Regarding Continuous Nursing Education', *International Journal of Nursing & Clinical Practices*, 6.1 (2019) <<https://doi.org/10.15344/2394-4978/2019/305>>.

⁵ Monique Sedgwick and others, 'A Scoping Review of the Integration of Ethics Education in Undergraduate Nursing High-fidelity Human Simulation-based Learning', *Journal of Clinical Nursing*, 30.5–6 (2021), 605–14 <<https://doi.org/10.1111/jocn.15552>>.

⁶ Christine R. Espina and Emily Spracklin, 'Social Media Literacy in an Infodemic', *Nurse Educator*, 46.6 (2021), 332–332 <<https://doi.org/10.1097/NNE.0000000000001115>>.

⁷ Demiray and others.

⁸ Salwa Hassanein and others, 'Artificial Intelligence in Nursing: An Integrative Review of Clinical and Operational Impacts', *Frontiers in Digital Health*, 7 (2025) <<https://doi.org/10.3389/fdgth.2025.1552372>>.

⁹ Huijuan Ma and others, 'Nursing Students' Perception of Digital Technology in Clinical Education Among Undergraduate Programs: A Qualitative Systematic Review', *Journal of Professional Nursing*, 53 (2024), 49–56 <<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.profnurs.2024.04.008>>.

¹⁰ B. Kraft and others, 'Exploring Digital Care: Developing Ethical Competencies', *Gerontechnology*, 23.s (2024), 1–1 <<https://doi.org/10.4017/gt.2024.23.s.1057.op>>.

interacting with sensitive patient data or engaging in online communications. This reflection is crucial for ensuring that nursing students uphold ethical standards, even in the digital realm.

The digital age presents new ethical dilemmas for nursing students, many of which may arise from a lack of awareness rather than intentional misconduct¹¹. For example, students may not fully grasp the ethical implications of posting patient-related content on social media or sharing health-related opinions online. Civic education serves as a preventive measure by offering frameworks for ethical decision-making and critical reasoning. This education helps students recognize the consequences of their actions, not only for the individuals involved but also for society at large¹². Moreover, civic education fosters integrity, guiding students to make ethical choices that extend beyond academic obligations and into their professional lives.

In addition to ethical reasoning, civic education emphasizes the importance of democratic values such as justice, equality, and human rights, which are integral to nursing practice¹³. By learning these values, students gain a deeper understanding of their role not only as caregivers but also as members of society. This broader perspective is essential in an age where issues like digital equity and patients' rights are becoming increasingly relevant. Civic education encourages nursing students to consider these societal issues and their implications in the digital landscape, where disparities in access to technology and information may exacerbate existing health inequalities.

Furthermore, civic education plays an important role in character development, helping students build a strong moral foundation that guides their behavior in complex ethical situations. Ethical challenges in the digital age can be subtle and situational, requiring judgment and personal integrity. By instilling values such as honesty, responsibility, and respect, civic education prepares nursing students to navigate these challenges effectively. In addition, it enhances their ability to act ethically even in the absence of direct supervision. This intrinsic motivation to uphold ethical standards is crucial for sustaining professional integrity in an ever-changing digital landscape.

The digitalization of healthcare also necessitates greater attention to data protection and cybersecurity. As nursing students increasingly interact with electronic health records, telemedicine platforms, and other digital tools, it is vital for them to understand the importance of safeguarding patient information. Civic education can help by introducing students to legal literacy and the principles of data privacy, ensuring they are aware of the ethical and legal implications of handling sensitive data. This knowledge equips students with the competencies needed to navigate the challenges of a tech-driven healthcare system, thereby safeguarding both patients and healthcare professionals from the risks of digital breaches.

The aim of this research is to explore the role of civic education in shaping the ethical behavior of nursing students, particularly in the context of digital platforms. Specifically, the study seeks to answer the following research questions: How does civic education influence nursing students' ethical awareness and decision-making in digital environments? How can the integration of civic education into nursing curricula help students navigate the ethical challenges

¹¹ Hamid Reza Koohestani and others, 'Lived Experiences of Nursing Students About Ethical Concerns Regarding Mobile Learning in Educational and Clinical Contexts', *Journal of Medical Ethics and History of Medicine*, 2019 <<https://doi.org/10.18502/jmehm.v12i5.858>>.

¹² Josephine Karla Anna Bratz and Marcelo Sandoval-Ramirez, 'Ethical Competences for the Development of Nursing Care', *Revista Brasileira de Enfermagem*, 71.suppl 4 (2018), 1810–14 <<https://doi.org/10.1590/0034-7167-2017-0539>>.

¹³ Batool Poorchangizi and others, 'The Importance of Professional Values from Nursing Students' Perspective', *BMC Nursing*, 18.1 (2019), 26 <<https://doi.org/10.1186/s12912-019-0351-1>>.

posed by technology in healthcare? By answering these questions, the research aims to provide valuable insights into how educational frameworks can better prepare nursing students for the ethical complexities of a digitalized world.

2. Research Method

This study employs a qualitative research methodology to explore how civic education influences nursing students' ethical behavior in the digital age¹⁴. A descriptive phenomenological approach is used to understand the lived experiences of nursing students as they navigate ethical challenges in digital environments. Data will be collected through semi-structured interviews with nursing students from several universities in Indonesia. These interviews will focus on students' experiences with digital tools in their learning and clinical practices, as well as their understanding of civic education and its role in shaping ethical decision-making. Participants will be selected using purposive sampling to ensure they have been exposed to civic education as part of their curriculum¹⁵.

The collected data will be analyzed using thematic analysis, which involves identifying key themes and patterns in the responses to understand how civic education influences ethical behavior in digital contexts. Thematic analysis will involve several stages: familiarizing with the data, coding important segments, grouping codes into themes, and reviewing these themes for accuracy^{16,17}. The findings will be supported by quotes from participants, which will provide a deeper understanding of their perceptions and experiences. In addition to interviews, document analysis of nursing curricula and course syllabi will be conducted to understand how civic education is integrated into the nursing program.

3. Results and Discussion

This study aimed to examine the role of civic education in shaping the ethical behavior of nursing students, particularly in the context of digital environments. The findings revealed several key themes regarding how civic education influences nursing students' ethical awareness and decision-making, and how they apply these lessons to digital platforms and patient care.

3.1. Ethical Awareness in the Digital Age

One of the primary themes that emerged from the data is the students' increased awareness of ethical issues in the digital age. Nursing students recognized that digital tools such as social media, electronic health records, and telemedicine have transformed healthcare, making it essential to maintain ethical behavior in these spaces. Many students emphasized the importance of understanding ethical principles, such as patient confidentiality and informed consent, not

¹⁴ Nancy Cannaerts, Chris Gastmans, and Bernadette Dierckx de Casterlé, 'Contribution of Ethics Education to The Ethical Competence of Nursing Students', *Nursing Ethics*, 21.8 (2014), 861–78 <<https://doi.org/10.1177/0969733014523166>>.

¹⁵ Marzieh Shayestehfard and others, 'Ethical Sensitivity in Nursing Students: Developing a Context-Based Education', *Electronic Journal of General Medicine*, 17.2 (2020), em195 <<https://doi.org/10.29333/ejgm/7812>>.

¹⁶ Annelie J. Sundler and others, 'Qualitative Thematic Analysis Based on Descriptive Phenomenology', *Nursing Open*, 6.3 (2019), 733–39 <<https://doi.org/10.1002/nop2.275>>.

¹⁷ Muannif Ridwan and others, 'Approaches in Legal Research (A Introduction about Study Analysis Western Law and Islamic Law)', in *Proceedings of the 6th Batusangkar International Conference (BIC)* (West Sumatra, Indonesia: EAI, 2022), pp. 126–35 <<https://doi.org/10.4108/eai.11-10-2021.2319623>>.

just in face-to-face interactions but also when engaging with digital platforms. The integration of civic education in their curriculum was seen as crucial in shaping this awareness.

The students' responses indicated that while they were exposed to these ethical standards through their coursework, it was often through practical examples and case studies that they learned how to apply these principles to digital contexts. This finding aligns with the idea that civic education provides a framework for thinking critically about professional behavior in various environments, including digital spaces. Students expressed that civic education provided them with a moral compass, allowing them to navigate the complexities of digital health practices responsibly.

3.2. Influence of Civic Education on Ethical Decision-Making

The role of civic education in ethical decision-making was another significant theme identified in the research. Students reported that their civic education courses had been instrumental in helping them understand the relationship between their actions and their broader responsibilities as healthcare professionals and digital citizens. Civic education, particularly its focus on responsibility, discipline, and accountability, was cited by students as a foundation for making ethical decisions, especially when faced with dilemmas involving patient data, social media interactions, or telemedicine.

In particular, students highlighted that civic education encouraged them to think critically about their actions and the potential consequences, not only for themselves but for their patients and the healthcare system. One student stated, "Civic education taught me to consider the ethical implications of every digital action, whether it's sharing a post, accessing patient data, or even commenting on a healthcare issue online." This reflects the broader idea that civic education helps students develop a strong ethical framework that informs their decision-making, especially in the complex landscape of digital healthcare.

3.3. Challenges in Ethical Behavior in Digital Environments

Despite the positive influence of civic education, students acknowledged that they still faced challenges when navigating ethical behavior in digital environments¹⁸. One challenge mentioned frequently was the temptation to engage in improper online behavior, such as sharing patient-related content or discussing cases on social media without considering privacy concerns. This was particularly common among students who had limited exposure to formal ethics training prior to their nursing program. Many students admitted that they did not initially understand the full implications of posting or sharing patient information online, even if the content was intended to be educational¹⁹.

This issue highlights the gap that civic education seeks to fill. As several participants pointed out, they were initially unaware of the ethical risks posed by digital platforms. However, after taking courses that emphasized ethical reasoning and digital responsibility, they felt more equipped to handle such situations. The introduction of civic education into the curriculum,

¹⁸ Ankit Shrestha and others, 'Understanding The Challenges In Academia to Prepare Nursing Students for Digital Technology Use at Workplace', in *Computer Supported Cooperative Work and Social Computing* (New York, NY, USA: ACM, 2023), pp. 96–100 <<https://doi.org/10.1145/3584931.3607002>>.

¹⁹ Ana Carolina Barboza Brandão and others, 'Nursing Students and The Internet: A Reflection Of Digital Ethics', *Revista Brasileira de Enfermagem*, 77.suppl 4 (2024) <<https://doi.org/10.1590/0034-7167-2023-0459>>.

therefore, helped fill an important gap in their training, preparing them for the ethical dilemmas they would face in their careers²⁰.

3.4. Role of Civic Education in Preventing Ethical Violations

The research also found that civic education plays a preventive role in reducing ethical violations in digital contexts. Many students noted that, prior to their training, they had not fully grasped the seriousness of ethical breaches in digital platforms. For example, the dissemination of misinformation or the violation of patient confidentiality on social media was seen as a minor issue by some students before they received civic education. However, once they were educated on the legal and professional consequences of these actions, they became more cautious about their online behavior.

One key finding is that students who had received civic education were more likely to engage in reflective practices when using digital tools in patient care. This reflective behavior was seen as a key component in preventing ethical violations, as students reported regularly pausing to assess the potential impact of their digital actions. For example, before posting anything related to healthcare or patient experiences on social media, students now ask themselves whether the content respects privacy and upholds professional standards. This preventive aspect of civic education was particularly highlighted in nursing ethics courses, where students discussed real-life scenarios and how they would handle them ethically in both physical and digital spaces.

3.5. Impact of Civic Education on Digital Citizenship

Another novel aspect of the findings was the emphasis placed on digital citizenship as part of the broader framework of civic education. In today's healthcare environment, nursing students must understand that ethical behavior extends beyond the hospital or clinic and into their digital lives. Civic education helped students understand the concept of digital citizenship, which emphasizes responsible online behavior, critical media literacy, and the importance of verifying health-related information before sharing it. This was particularly important as many students reported the increasing reliance on digital platforms for professional networking, patient education, and information-sharing.

Students stated that the integration of digital citizenship into their nursing programs prepared them to navigate digital spaces ethically. One participant explained, "Civic education has made me aware of how I represent myself and my profession online. It's not just about being a good nurse in the clinic, but also about being a responsible digital citizen." This perspective shows that civic education can significantly impact how nursing students perceive their roles as professionals in both physical and virtual spaces.

3.6. Bridging Theory and Practice

The research also found that the integration of civic education in nursing curricula helps bridge the gap between theory and practice. Although nursing students are often taught ethical principles through theoretical frameworks, it is through civic education that these principles are applied in real-world scenarios. Students reported that the case studies, role-playing exercises,

²⁰ Samira Obeid and Michal Man, 'Strengthening Perceptions of Ethical Competence Among Nursing Students and Graduates', *SAGE Open Nursing*, 6 (2020) <<https://doi.org/10.1177/2377960820924170>>.

and discussions related to digital ethics helped them connect classroom learning with practical, professional behavior.

Several students noted that the practical exercises allowed them to reflect on their behavior and see firsthand the consequences of unethical digital actions. These hands-on experiences were invaluable in helping students integrate ethical reasoning into their daily routines, both academically and professionally. As one student shared, “The combination of theory and practice in civic education helped me see the real-world implications of ethical issues and understand how to act responsibly online.”

3.7. Civic Education's Contribution to Character Building

A crucial element that emerged from the data was the contribution of civic education to character building among nursing students. Beyond providing knowledge of ethical codes, civic education helped students develop a strong moral character that guided their behavior. This was particularly significant when it came to making ethical decisions in situations where there was no clear right or wrong answer, such as when sharing health-related information online or engaging with patients in a digital consultation.

The development of values such as integrity, honesty, and responsibility was seen as essential for sustaining ethical behavior, especially in complex and fast-changing digital environments. As nursing students recognized, the ethical standards they learned in the classroom were not just for exams or assignments but were vital for their entire professional life. The internalization of these values through civic education equipped them to uphold ethical standards even when no one was supervising their actions.

Finally, the study found that the integration of civic education into nursing programs had broader societal implications. Many students noted that the values taught in civic education helped them understand their role not just as healthcare providers but as citizens in a larger society. By emphasizing the importance of social justice, equality, and human rights, civic education inspired students to consider how their actions could impact not just their patients, but society at large.

Students reported that learning about the social determinants of health and the ethical obligations of nurses in promoting social equity had made them more attuned to issues like digital equity and healthcare access. This broader perspective on ethics is important in an era where digital tools can either exacerbate or reduce existing health disparities. By fostering an awareness of these issues, civic education contributes to the development of nursing professionals who are socially responsible and committed to improving public health, both in the physical and digital realms.

4. Conclusion

The integration of civic education in nursing curricula significantly influences the ethical behavior of nursing students, particularly in digital environments. By promoting ethical awareness and decision-making, civic education helps students understand the importance of professional conduct both in person and online. The study reveals that civic education is instrumental in shaping students' ability to handle ethical challenges, such as maintaining patient confidentiality and navigating the complexities of sharing health-related information on social media.

Additionally, civic education encourages students to critically reflect on their actions, fostering responsible digital citizenship and equipping them with the skills needed to assess the

ethical implications of their behavior in digital spaces. It bridges theoretical knowledge and real-world practice, preparing nursing students to apply ethical standards in their professional lives and ensure they maintain respect for human dignity, confidentiality, and accountability. The study further highlights how civic education promotes an understanding of broader societal issues like social justice, equity, and patients' rights in the digital age.

Through its emphasis on values such as integrity, responsibility, and respect, civic education enables students to internalize and apply ethical principles in their decision-making. This process ensures that nursing students are not only capable healthcare providers but also responsible members of society in a digital world. Ultimately, the findings affirm that civic education plays a crucial role in preparing nursing students to address the ethical challenges of modern digital healthcare, fostering a more responsible and ethically grounded healthcare system.

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