Asta Heikkilä

Research knowledge utilisation of polytechnic nursing students on graduation

University of Turku, Faculty of Medicine, Department of Nursing Science.

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to evaluate three aspects of nursing education: 1) the nursing students’ (midwives’, nurses’ and public health nurses’) qualifications in research knowledge utilisation on completion of their nursing education, 2) the instruction given on the research knowledge utilisation, and 3) the students’ regulation of learning. In this context, the qualifications involve attitudes, skills and knowledge related to research knowledge utilisation. Principal lecturers in health care were first approached to define desirable research knowledge utilisation qualifications and instruction in nursing degree programmes. In addition, the aim of this study was to explore factors related to the nursing students’ research knowledge utilisation qualifications, to the instruction on research knowledge utilization and to the students’ regulation of learning.

The data for this study were collected in two phases through questionnaires specifically developed for this study. To define the desirable research knowledge utilisation qualifications and appropriate instruction, data were collected nation-wide through a postal enquiry from polytechnic principal lecturers in health care (n = 37) in 2001. The questionnaire included four open-ended questions, and the answers were analysed by content analysis. The second set of national data were collected through an Internet-based questionnaire from final-stage nursing students at polytechnics (n = 526, including 32 midwifery, 142 public health nurse and 352 nurse students). This questionnaire included structured questions and one open-ended question. The questions concerning the research knowledge utilisation qualifications and the instruction given on research knowledge utilisation were based on the results of the enquiry to the principal lecturers at polytechnics, whereas the students’ regulation of learning was measured by one section of the Inventory of Learning Styles (Vermunt, J. 1998. The regulation of constructive learning process. British Journal of Educational Psychology 68, 149–171). The data from the structured questions were analysed statistically by the SPSS 11.0 software and the open-ended question by content analysis.

The desirable attitude to the use of research knowledge was found to involve two categories: the appreciation of research knowledge and commitment to it. The desirable knowledge and skills involved the acquisition of research knowledge, critical reading of research knowledge and the application of research knowledge. The students’ attitudes towards the use of research knowledge were rather positive. The knowledge of research knowledge utilisation, however, was fair or poor among most nurse and public health nurse students. The midwifery students had good or excellent knowledge of using research knowledge. The self-reported skills of all groups of students were also above average. The overall amount of instruction on the use of research knowledge had been rather extensive. The learning, however, mainly occurred independently and by doing and there had been rather little instruction in the context of theoretical lessons or guided practical training periods. The students’ learning was mostly externally regulated and their degree of self-regulation below average. Their research knowledge utilisation skills seemed to depend on the amount of instruction, and on their level of self-regulation. Of the background variables, gender, age and educational background correlated with the students’ research knowledge utilisation qualifications, with their evaluation of the instruction and with the regulation of learning.

This dissertation yields proposals for the development of theoretical instruction, clinical teaching and management in nursing education. The Internet-based measurement tool developed during this study could be developed and tested to a greater extent. Finally, the students’ research knowledge utilisation qualifications should be further measured by other research methods and evaluated from the viewpoint of the lecturers and clinical instructors as well.

KEYWORDS: use of research knowledge, evidence based nursing, nursing education, learning results, instruction, regulation of learning, nursing student