

# Bridging the Gap from Theory to Practice: Teaching Evidence-based Nursing Strategies for Developing Critical Thinkers and Lifelong Learners

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**Abstract:** This manuscript responded to the call for the integration of evidence-based practice concept into the nursing curriculum. It aims to 1) review the importance of teaching evidence-based nursing in nursing education, 2) identify key principles and competencies associated with evidence-based nursing, and 3) provide evidence-based teaching strategies to foster critical thinking and research literacy among nursing students. Drawing from current pedagogical research and best practices, it provides a robust framework for enhancing teaching methodologies in the nursing field. Encompassing diverse evidence-based strategies ensures direct relevance and applicability in real-world clinical scenarios. Recognizing healthcare's dynamic, it serves as a comprehensive resource for nurse educators, fostering a profound understanding of evidence-based practices. By distilling insights from recent pedagogical studies, it establishes a strong foundation for continuous improvement in teaching methods, advocating for seamless integration of evidence-based strategies. In summary, this paper is vital for nurse educators to refine their instructional methodologies, offering evidence-based teaching strategies grounded in research and practical application. It significantly contributes to shaping a new generation of nursing professionals, equipping them with the requisite skills, knowledge, and the adaptive mindset necessary for effective evidence-based practice in the ever-evolving healthcare landscape.

**Keywords:** Critical thinking, Evidence-based nursing, Lifelong learning, Nursing education, Research literacy, Teaching strategies, Nursing education

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## Introduction: Integrating Evidence-based Practice into Nursing Education

The evolution of nursing education has been intricately linked with the progression of evidence-based practice (EBP). Evidence-based nursing education serves as the cornerstone for equipping nurses with

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the essential skills and knowledge required to deliver high-quality care rooted in the best available evidence. By integrating EBP into nursing education, nurses learn to appraise research findings critically, make informed clinical decisions, and continuously improve patient

outcomes. EBP also fosters a culture of lifelong learning, professional development, and critical thinking among nurses, ultimately contributing to enhanced quality, safety, and efficiency for the target population in healthcare settings. In today's ever-evolving healthcare landscape, the integration of EBP is indispensable for nurturing proficient and high-quality nursing care. Beyond mere application of research findings, EBP encompasses a comprehensive spectrum of nursing knowledge, attitudes, skills, and self-efficacy. As healthcare dynamics continue to shift, encountering new complexities and diverse patient demographics, it becomes imperative for nursing students to acquire the necessary knowledge and skills to navigate these changes adeptly in order to be ready to be certified nurses. Historically, the concept of EBP emerged as a response to the growing recognition of the importance of integrating research findings into clinical decision-making across healthcare disciplines.<sup>1</sup> Consequently, integrating EBP into both undergraduate and graduate nursing education programs becomes essential for bridging the gap between nursing theory and practice.<sup>2,3</sup> This paradigm shift towards EBP gained momentum as nurses began to emphasize the significance of critically appraising research findings before using them to inform their clinical practice. Recognizing the imperative for nursing students to be proficient in EBP stems from the goal of nurturing a new generation of nurses who excel not only in clinical skills but also in critically evaluating, applying, and advancing the scientific knowledge that underpins their practice.<sup>4,5</sup> Integrating EBP into nursing education is a pivotal and enduring strategy, shaping the future scope and nature of nursing practice.<sup>6,7</sup> It necessitates that nursing students expand their knowledge base, standardize practices, and ultimately enhance patient outcomes based on the updated evidences.<sup>8-10</sup>

In today's rapidly evolving healthcare environment, where information proliferates at an unprecedented rate, nursing students must discern the most current and relevant evidence. This empowers them to question

assumptions, challenge traditional practices, and foster a culture of continuous improvement in patient care. Nursing education plays a vital role in shaping the future of healthcare, with its alignment with EBP is essential for developing a workforce of competent, forward-thinking professionals. The significance of nursing education lies in its ability to equip students with the foundational principles of EBP, fostering a commitment to lifelong learning and proactive engagement with the evolving body of evidence.<sup>11</sup> By integrating EBP into nursing curricula, educators are instrumental in shaping a workforce capable of adapting to and thriving within the dynamic healthcare landscape. This transformative journey equips students with the competencies to evaluate research critically, make informed clinical decisions, and actively contribute to the advancement of healthcare practices. Emphasizing EBP in nursing, education represents a strategic investment in the delivery of high-quality, patient-centered care informed by the best available evidence.

## **The Evolution of Evidence-based Practice in Nursing**

The evolution of EBP in nursing reflects a dynamic process that has transformed the profession, promoted a culture of continuous improvement, and ensured that patient care is based on the best available evidence. Integrating research into nursing practice continues to be a vital component of delivering high-quality and patient-centered care. The trajectory of EBP in nursing marks a profound shift in patient care and clinical decision-making processes. This evolution began in the 1970s and 1980s, a period characterized by a growing recognition among nurses and other healthcare professionals of the necessity to integrate research evidence into clinical decision-making.<sup>12</sup>

*Early beginnings (1970s-1980s):* Archie Cochrane, a British epidemiologist and obstetrician-gynecologist, played a significant role by advocating

for the integration of evidence from clinical research into healthcare practice.<sup>13</sup>

*Formation of the Cochrane Collaboration (1993) and JBI (1993):* The establishment of the Cochrane Collaboration in 1994 served as a significant milestone, propelling evidence-based healthcare by generating systematic reviews of healthcare interventions based on rigorous research evidence. This led to the creation of the Cochrane Library, a repository of high-quality, up-to-date evidence to support clinical decision-making. Subsequently, JBI was founded in 1996. Complementing the work of the Cochrane Collaboration by emphasizing the importance of considering the context when implementing evidence into practice. The JBI's approach not only focuses on the effectiveness of intervention but also consider their feasibility, appropriateness, meaningfulness in specific clinical settings.<sup>14</sup> This boarder perspective aligns with the principle of EBP, which integrates the best available evidence with clinical expertise and patient values in medical decision-making.<sup>15</sup>

*Incorporation into nursing practice (1990s-2000s):* The adoption of EBP principles within nursing practice gained momentum during the 1990s and 2000s, with organizations encouraging a systematic approach to healthcare decision-making based on the best available evidence. This era saw the development of EBP guidelines and protocols, enhancing healthcare delivery quality, safety, and outcomes.<sup>7</sup>

*Integration into nursing education (2000s-2010s):* Nursing education programs increasingly incorporated EBP into their curricula. Nurses were trained to appraise research literature critically, integrate evidence into practice, and adapt care plans based on the latest research findings. The proliferation of technology, especially the internet, facilitated access to research literature and databases, enhancing the ability of nurses to engage with EBP processes.<sup>3,16</sup> EBP has led to a shift in the nursing culture, promoting a mindset of inquiry and a commitment to lifelong learning. Nurses are encouraged to question existing

practices, seek evidence, and adapt their approaches based on the best available information. EBP in nursing has evolved to emphasize the importance of incorporating patient preferences and values into decision-making. Patient-centered care involves collaborating with patients to make informed choices based on the best available evidence.<sup>17</sup>

*Ongoing challenges and future directions:* Challenges in implementing EBP persist, including barriers related to time constraints, lack of resources, and resistance to change.<sup>7,18,19</sup> The demanding nature of healthcare environments often imposes time limitations on nurses, hindering their ability to engage with EBP processes thoroughly. Moreover, the need for additional resources and the resistance to change within institutional cultures pose ongoing hurdles to the seamless integration of EBP. Despite these challenges, ongoing efforts within the nursing community remain steadfast in addressing these barriers and fostering a continued evolution of EBP in nursing. Collaborative initiatives, educational interventions, and advocacy for institutional support all play integral roles in overcoming challenges and propelling EBP forward in the future.<sup>8</sup>

## **Competencies in Evidence-based Nursing**

The proficiency of nursing professionals in seamlessly integrating research evidence into clinical decision-making and delivering superior evidence-based care hinges on mastering key competencies in evidence-based nursing practice. These competencies, integral to nursing education, prepare students to tackle the dynamic challenges of modern healthcare settings. Bhatarasakoon and colleagues<sup>2</sup> emphasize that information literacy, research literacy, critical appraisal skills, clinical judgment, effective communication, ethical considerations, ongoing learning, teamwork, leadership in EBP, and cultural competence are the fundamental competencies essential for EBP.

*Research literacy:* This competency involves the ability to critically read, comprehend, and interpret

research literature. For nursing students, achieving research literacy is imperative to effectively sift through and appraise the vast array of scientific literature. It equips them with the knowledge necessary to remain abreast of the latest evidence, thereby facilitating informed decisions in their clinical practice. Developing research literacy is a critical step towards empowering nursing students with the ability to question existing practices, introduce innovations in care, and contribute to the evidence base.<sup>2,8,20</sup> The emphasis on these competencies within nursing education underscores the importance of a curriculum that imparts theoretical knowledge and focuses on developing practical, evidence-based skills. By fostering these competencies, nursing programs ensure that graduates are well-equipped to contribute to the advancement of nursing practice through evidence-based decision-making and patient care.

*Analytical assessment abilities:* Nursing students must possess the ability to assess the methodological quality of research studies critically. This entails evaluating the study design, execution, and methodology to affirm the credibility of the results. Such critical appraisal is vital for discerning the strength of evidence, recognizing potential biases, and assessing the relevance of research findings to specific clinical scenarios. These skills are crucial for integrating evidence-based insights into nursing practice, thereby enhancing care quality and patient outcomes.<sup>1,6,21</sup>

*Clinical judgment:* The integration of evidence from research with clinical expertise and patient preferences is essential for informed decision-making in patient care. Effective clinical judgment enables nursing students to make decisions that are both scientifically sound and tailored to the unique needs of each patient, thereby optimizing patient outcomes. This competency underscores the importance of a holistic approach to nursing care that marries empirical evidence with personalized care strategies.<sup>22,23</sup>

*Information literacy:* In an era characterized by rapid information growth, the ability to efficiently

locate and utilize current evidence is indispensable for nursing practice. Information literacy encompasses the skills required for effective searching and accessing of up-to-date primary research studies and clinical guidelines. This competency ensures that nursing students can navigate the wealth of available information to find evidence that informs and enhances their practice.<sup>24,25</sup>

*Communication skills:* Nursing students should be able to communicate evidence-based information effectively to colleagues, patients, and members of interdisciplinary teams. Articulate and succinct communication of evidence-based data fosters collaboration, encourages shared decision-making, and guarantees the integration of the most pertinent evidence into the comprehensive healthcare plan.<sup>26,27</sup>

*Ethical considerations:* Awareness and adherence to ethical standards in the application of evidence in practice are paramount. Nursing students need to be aware of ethical considerations when using evidence in practice, ensuring that decisions are made with respect for patient rights and ethical standards such as patient autonomy, privacy, and confidentiality.<sup>28,29</sup> Ethical considerations ensure that evidence-based decisions are made with integrity and respect for patients' values.

*Continuous learning:* The dynamic nature of healthcare necessitates a commitment to continuous learning. This ensures nursing students remain informed about the latest research, contributing to the ongoing evolution of EBP.<sup>7,30</sup>

*Team collaboration:* Team collaboration is essential for promoting a holistic approach to patient care. Nursing students must effectively communicate evidence to colleagues from various disciplines to optimize patient outcomes.<sup>31</sup>

*Leadership in EBP:* Nursing students should be equipped with leadership skills. Leadership skills are vital for advocating and implementing evidence-based practices within clinical settings. This competency encourages a culture of continuous improvement and quality enhancement in healthcare services.<sup>32</sup>

**Cultural competence:** The ability to integrate cultural considerations into evidence-based practice is crucial. Cultural competence ensures that nursing students respect the cultural context of patients, applying evidence-based interventions that are sensitive and appropriate for diverse populations.<sup>33</sup>

The integration of these foundation competencies into nursing education is crucial for preparing students to become proficient evidence-based practitioners. These skills equip nursing students to deliver care that is safe, effective, and patient-centered, particularly in the context of a rapidly evolving healthcare environment. Embedding these competencies within nursing curricula is instrumental in developing a skilled, knowledgeable nursing workforce committed to enhancing the quality and safety of patient care.

## **Teaching Strategies for Evidence-based Nursing**

Teaching EBP is crucial in nursing education to equip students with the necessary skills and competencies to deliver high-quality, evidence-based care. Whether at the bachelor's, post-graduate, or graduate level, nursing students must be prepared to critically appraise research, integrate evidence into practice, and continuously improve patient outcomes. As the healthcare landscape evolves, there is an increasing demand for nurses who can effectively apply EBP principles to address complex healthcare challenges. Therefore, developing effective teaching strategies tailored to the educational level of students is essential to foster a culture of lifelong learning and evidence-based decision-making among future nurses. The teaching strategies include, but not limit to:

### **Journal Clubs and Critical Appraisal Exercises**

Journal clubs and critical appraisal exercises are pivotal in enriching nursing students' abilities to evaluate research literature critically. These structured activities foster collaboration and enable the development

of essential research literacy skills.<sup>7,34,35</sup> By actively engaging students in the critical analysis of research, nursing educators enhance research literacy and instill a culture of inquiry and EBP within the educational environment.

### **Incorporating Technology**

The integration of technology, including access to online databases and EBP tools, is fundamental in teaching nursing students how to access and utilize current research effectively. This technological approach streamlines information retrieval and facilitates the integration of EBP into nursing education, thereby creating engaging learning experiences.<sup>36</sup> Through this method, educators empower students to effectively harness current research, preparing them for the integration of EBP into their future clinical roles.<sup>6</sup>

### **Collaborative Learning**

Collaboration EBP learning with clinical settings in nursing education underscores its crucial role in equipping students with the EBP skills necessary for navigating the complexities of healthcare practice. By engaging in joint analysis of evidence and clinical problem-solving, students cultivate critical thinking, enhance their communication skills, and deeply value the collective aspect of healthcare delivery.<sup>37,38</sup> These collaborative experiences are fundamental to a well-rounded education for nursing professionals, preparing them to thrive in the multifaceted and dynamic environments of modern healthcare systems.

## **Challenges of Teaching and Learning**

### **EBP in Nursing Curriculum**

The advanced practice nurse (APN) curriculum in Thailand has recognized the importance of EBP and has integrated it as one of the core competencies since 2003,<sup>39</sup> aligning with the emphasis of the International Council of Nurses (ICN) on the requirement for APNs, especially those with clinical specialist focus to provide evidence-based care for

patients.<sup>40</sup> It is noteworthy that the integration of the EBP concept into nursing curricula varies across the globe, with Thailand serving as an example of emphasizing EBP as one of core competencies.<sup>41</sup> However, research indicates that nurses require additional development in knowledge and skills to effectively utilize EBP.<sup>41</sup> Therefore, integrating EBP into nursing curriculum early in their education is essential to introduce them to its principles and practices. Teaching EBP presents its own set of challenges in nursing education. One of the primary challenges is ensuring that nursing students develop the necessary skills to critically appraise research findings and apply them to clinical practice properly.<sup>19</sup> This requires educators to design curriculum and teaching methods that effectively engage students in the process of identifying, accessing, and evaluating evidence. It will involve other relevant knowledge i.e., research methodology and statistics. It is necessary to plan for each step of EBP to match with the readiness of the students along the curriculum structure. For example, the first-year students in bachelor's degree programs may need to learn how to search for evidence comprehensively and tools to evaluate the evidence may need to make it friendly use for the novice researchers. In Master's education and Certified Board Programs, nursing institutions prioritize rigorous teaching of EBP to empower advanced practice nurses as leaders in implementing cutting-edge healthcare methodologies.<sup>41</sup> The curriculum is meticulously crafted to equip nurses with the necessary tools and knowledge to excel in EBP, ensuring they become adept leaders in translating research into actionable practice guidelines. Through a blend of theoretical knowledge and hands-on experience, these master's and post-graduate prepared nurses are actively guided in applying EBP principles to real-world scenarios, engaging in case studies, simulations, and clinical rotations that challenge them to integrate evidence into practice. They participate

in critical appraisal exercises, learning to assess the validity and reliability of research findings and apply them judiciously to clinical decision-making. Importantly, the practice of acquiring and appraising EBP is seamlessly integrated into their thesis development, ensuring that students not only demonstrate mastery of EBP principles but also contribute original research that advances the field of translation science to bridge the gap between knowledge and practice.

Generally, incorporating EBP into nursing education often requires significant faculty development to enhance educators' own knowledge and skills in EBP.<sup>7</sup> Another challenge is resource limitations also pose significant challenges to effectively teaching EBP in nursing education. Insufficient accessibility to up-to-date research literature, databases, and information technology can hinder students' ability to engage in evidence-based learning.<sup>42</sup> Additionally, limited financial resources may constrain the development of faculty expertise in EBP and the implementation of innovative teaching methods.<sup>43</sup> Nursing programs may struggle to provide adequate training and support for faculty members to stay abreast of the latest advancements in EBP.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, limited clinical placements and opportunities for hands-on experience with EBP in real-world settings can impede students' ability to apply EBP principles in practice.<sup>44</sup> Limited time within the curriculum and competing demands for content coverage can also be barriers to effectively teaching EBP.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, some students may struggle with the concept of EBP or resist its integration into their learning due to perceived complexity or lack of relevance to their clinical practice.<sup>44</sup> Overcoming these challenges requires a multifaceted approach that includes faculty training, curriculum redesign, innovative teaching strategies, and ongoing support for both educators and students. By addressing these challenges, nursing education can better prepare students to become proficient in EBP and translate research evidence into high-quality patient care.

## **Conclusions and Recommendations**

In conclusion, the deployment of effective evidence-based teaching strategies within nursing education requires a holistic and integrative approach, encompassing the formulation of explicit learning objectives, the seamless integration of EBP principles throughout the educational curriculum, the application of theory in clinical contexts, the adoption of interactive pedagogical methods, the incorporation of technological resources, and the fostering of collaborative learning milieus. These pedagogical strategies are designed to nurture critical analytical abilities, inculcate a perpetual culture of scholarly inquiry, and equip nursing students with the competencies necessary for the incorporation of empirical evidence into their clinical practice.

Nursing educators play a pivotal role in molding the next generation of nursing professionals by exemplifying EBP behaviors, offering guidance and mentorship, and cultivating a conducive academic atmosphere. The synchronization of evaluative techniques with EBP competencies, coupled with ongoing assessment and feedback mechanisms and their integration within quality enhancement projects, further facilitates the developmental trajectory of students within the domain of evidence-based nursing.

Fundamentally, supported by institutional backing and faculty training, these educational strategies grounded in evidence equip nursing students with the skills to excel in EBP. Proficiency in EBP enables them to make informed clinical decisions, ultimately enhancing patient care outcomes throughout their careers. The overarching goal is to foster a cohort of nursing professionals proficient in both clinical expertise and advocacy for EBP, dedicated to lifelong learning and versatility to the advancement in healthcare's dynamic environment.

By immersing students in such a dynamic educational milieu, they not only acquire a profound understanding of EBP but also gain practical skills and confidence to drive positive changes in healthcare

delivery. Consequently, a steadfast dedication to excellence in EBP education ensures that graduates emerge as knowledgeable practitioners and influential leaders capable of spearheading the development and implementation of evidence-based practice guidelines, thereby establishing benchmarks for quality patient care, which contributes to advance nursing practice and science.

## **Authors' Contributions**

**Primary Author (PB):** PB led the conceptualization and organization of the academic article. Her key contributions involved framing the article, conducting literature reviews, and crafting the narrative. PB played a pivotal role in drafting the content, ensuring clarity and cohesion in conveying essential ideas.

**Corresponding Author (CC):** CC's duties included framing the article, searching and conducting literature reviews, drafting the content, ensuring clarity and cohesion in conveying essential ideas, overseeing the manuscript's progress, facilitating communication among authors, and incorporating diverse viewpoints. She coordinated the collaborative efforts among all authors during the article's development. Additionally, she managed the revision process and responded to editorial feedback.

## **Conflict of Interest**

All authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest related to this study that they are aware of.

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## เชื่อมโยงระหว่างทฤษฎีและปฏิบัติ : กลยุทธ์การสอนหลักฐานเชิงประจำชั้นทางการพยาบาลเพื่อพัฒนาผู้เรียนด้านการคิดวิเคราะห์และการเรียนรู้ตลอดชีวิต

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บทคัดย่อ: บทความนี้นำเสนอการบูรณาการหลักฐานเชิงประจำชั้นเข้ากับหลักสูตรพยาบาล มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อ 1) บททวนความสำคัญของการสอนหลักฐานเชิงประจำชั้นทางการพยาบาลในหลักสูตรการเรียนการสอนพยาบาล 2) อธิบายหลักการและสมรรถนะหลักที่เกี่ยวข้องกับหลักฐานเชิงประจำชั้นทางการพยาบาล และ 3) นำเสนอกลยุทธ์การสอนหลักฐานเชิงประจำชั้นเพื่อการต้นการคิดวิเคราะห์และความรอบรู้ด้านการวิจัยสำหรับนักศึกษาพยาบาล ผู้ประพันธ์รวมข้อมูลจากการวิจัยทางการศึกษาที่ดีที่สุด เพื่อส่งเสริมประสิทธิภาพการสอนในสาขาวิชาพยาบาลศาสตร์ การนำเสนอเอกลักษณ์ที่เชื่อถือได้ของหลักฐานเป็นส่วนหนึ่ง จะทำให้มีความสอดคล้องและมีประสิทธิภาพในสถานการณ์คลินิกในโลกแห่งความเป็นจริง ปัจจุบันการดูแลสุขภาพมีการเปลี่ยนแปลงอย่างต่อเนื่อง ดังนั้นบทความนี้จึงเป็นแหล่งทรัพยากรสำหรับผู้สอนพยาบาลในการสอนให้ผู้เรียนเกิดความเข้าใจเกี่ยวกับการปฏิบัติตามหลักฐานเชิงประจำชั้น กล่าวโดยสรุป บทความนี้มีประโยชน์สำหรับนักการศึกษาพยาบาลในการปรับปรุงวิธีการสอนโดยให้กลยุทธ์การสอนที่ใช้หลักฐานเชิงประจำชั้นมีพื้นฐานมาจากวิจัยและการปฏิบัติซึ่งจะมีส่วนในการพัฒนาผู้เรียนมีทักษะ ความรู้ และมีทัศนคติที่ดีในการนำหลักฐานเชิงประจำชั้นไปใช้ในการตัดสินใจและการพัฒนาความสามารถที่เปลี่ยนแปลงอย่างต่อเนื่อง

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คำสำคัญ: หลักฐานเชิงประจำชั้นทางการพยาบาล กลยุทธ์การสอน การคิดวิเคราะห์ ความรอบรู้ ด้านการวิจัย การเรียนรู้ตลอดชีวิต การศึกษาการพยาบาล

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