

Learning Experiences with Active Learning Method Applied during the Early Years of Undergraduate Nursing Students : Through Global Nursing Training Course in the Philippines

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Purpose: The purpose of this study is to describe the experiences of the first year undergraduate nursing students in a Japanese private university. It illustrates their progress in learning through participating in sequential steps in preparatory studies with active learning methodology in the Global Nursing Training Course held in the Philippines in March 2014.

Methods: All of the study participants (N=28) were 1st year undergraduate nursing students including four male and 24 female students between the ages of 19 and 35 who participated in the global nursing training course in the Philippines. They have voluntarily applied for the program and all of them were selected.

Result : Analysis of active learning reflective journals demonstrated the learners' progress in three phases, preparatory, in the field, and post-training course. Study results illustrated that use of active learning strategies led to gain in knowledge, critical thinking, behavioral modification, and motivation, and willingness to challenge avoidant behavior of the learners. The sequential steps of preparatory study helped the learners to overcome difficult tasks and to set goals that reflect their future desires.

Conclusion: Data from participants' reflective journal demonstrated changes in study attitudes, sense of self, and the significance of having real involvement as global nurses. Although implementation of active learning strategies requires planning and effort by both students and teachers or mentors, this study has documented benefit from starting in the early stages of the undergraduate program to maximize benefits such as critical thinking and self-reflection as students continue their nursing education.

Key words: active learning, global nursing, undergraduate nursing education, self-directed learning

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I. Introduction

Active learning is believed to be an effective learning approach that promotes self-directed problem-solving abilities and critical thinking skills, in addition to improvement in the knowledge, skills and attitude domains of nursing students (Ishii, Kashima, Fukahara, et al., 2012; Kong, Qin, Zhou, et al., 2013; Murad, Coto-Yglesias, Varkey, et al., 2010). Students who are actively engaged in guided discussions and group work are more likely to develop better problem solving and critical thinking skills (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001; Blair, 2004; Nelson, 2006). Applying such study methods to the early years of undergraduate nursing studies is especially crucial. It not only helps students to engage in activities of learning that promotes analysis, synthesis, and evaluation of class contents but also provides the students opportunities to experience a sense of accomplishment and motivation to study for the rest of their undergraduate programs (Ishii, Kashima, Fukahara, et al., 2012).

The sequence of learning activities offered in the nursing curriculum of Soka University helps students to gain deeper levels of understanding of global nursing and healthcare issues through research study with effective learning methodologies that cultivate critical thinking skills and increase their study motivation in the early stages of the curriculum. The curriculum is designed to offer some elective didactic classes and actual

training courses overseas in which the nursing students can enroll in their early years of the program.

II. Research purpose.

This study uses qualitative analysis of student reflective journals to describe the experiences of the first year undergraduate nursing students in a Japanese private university. It illustrates their progress in learning through participating in sequential steps in their preparatory studies with active learning methodology in the Global Nursing Training Course held in the Philippines in March 2014.

III. Definition

1. Active Learning.

Active learning defined as a process whereby students engage in self-directed activities of learning that stimulate higher-order cognitive processes such as critical thinking and analysis (Bevis, 1989). *Active learning* promotes analysis, synthesis, and evaluation of class content and provides the students with opportunities to experience a sense of accomplishment and motivation to study for the rest of their undergraduate program (Ishii, Kashima, Fukahara, et al., 2012). Chickering and Gamson (1987) define seven principles of good practice in undergraduate education introduced as important ingredients of *active learning*. These are (1) interactions between students and educators; (2) reciprocity and

cooperation among students; (3) active involvement of learners; (4) prompt feedback from educators; (5) sufficient time on task; (6) high expectations provided by educators for learners; and (7) respect for diversity and different ways of learning.

IV. Method

1. Research participants.

All of the study participants (N=28) were 1st year undergraduate nursing students of a private university including four male and 24 female students between the ages of 19 and 35 who participated in the Global Nursing Training Course in the Philippines. They have voluntarily applied for the program and all of them were selected.

2. Ethical considerations.

The study protocol was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of Soka University, Tokyo Japan (Approval Number 28001). Study participation was not considered to pose any risk of harm for the participants or to create any personal or social gain for the researcher. No deception was used in the study. Given the student/faculty relationship between the participants and the researcher, effort was made to insure that students' participation in the study was voluntary.

Informed consent. The principal investigator provided each participating student with written documentation and verbal explanation about the study's purpose and methods before requesting that participants sign a consent

form. Participants were required to verbalize their understanding as well as signing the study participation consent form. The request for cooperation explained that participation in this study is fully voluntary and that participants can withdraw from their participation form this study at any time without any negative consequences. Participants would not be asked to provide specific reason. Failure to participate in, or withdrawal from, the study would not affect the participants' grades or their progression in the academic program. No further questions were asked after the termination of study. All of the students agreed and completed the study.

Participants' privacy and confidentiality were protected during and after this study. Information provided by the study participants will be kept confidential and solely for the purpose of this study. Participants were allowed to review the analysis of their data during the study. Study participants will remain anonymous in all reports resulting from the study.

3. Global Nursing Training Course.

The Global Nursing Training Course in the Philippines is included in the nursing curriculum to help students understand global perspectives in healthcare, including needs and challenges in the processes of providing culturally competent care to diverse populations inside and outside of Japan. Training course objectives are: (1) to provide opportunities for students to establish a global perspectives on health and nursing; (2) to

provide students with diverse learning environments to understand culturally competent care; and (3) to enable students to reflect on nursing care in Japan through studying nursing practices overseas. In an elective global nursing didactic course prior to the actual visit overseas, students receive lectures from visiting professor from Capitol University College of Nursing in the Philippines and/or the University of the Philippines Manila, College of Nursing, where the training courses are held.

These lectures provide basic knowledge on people and country of the Philippines, as well as practices in nursing and healthcare. During the preparatory study before leaving for the training course, the students use active learning strategies to prepare for group research study. Two months before departure, the students received instructions in basic techniques of how to conduct research and start a literature search to select a group research topic. After selecting the research

topic, the students meet in groups to start discussion on research objectives and research questions. In the Philippines, with mentorship support, the students collect data based on their research plan and analyze the data to prepare for presentations. Phases of the training course process are summarized in (Figure 1).

4. Data sources and analysis

Qualitative methods were utilized to analyze narrative data in participants' reflective journals. An active learning reflective journal is a means of recording narrative descriptions of students' experiences, insights and reflections during their learning process of pre-, during, and post-training course. Students entries describes the following in their journals: (1) preparatory study learning experiences; (2) experiences during and after the training course; (3) overall learning experiences, and (4) free format narrative description of their training course experiences in any phase. Participants were required to turn in these



Figure 1 Preparatory studies and Global Nursing Training Course

journals two months after they returned from the Philippines, allowing time for reflection on the entire training course experience. These reflective journals were the source of research data. The process of analyzing the data has begun with reviewing the entire reflective journal, identifying categories and themes as well as phases in the learning process of study participants. Then, the data was carefully reexamined through to compile the journal entries under the appropriate categories. Some representative quotes were selected and listed on the Table 1.

In order to enhance the quality and credibility of the data analysis, the data was analyzed several times by co-researcher who has participated in this training course.

IV. Results

Analysis of active learning reflective journals demonstrated the learners' progress in learning. Three phases of the process were identified: 1) preparatory learning that occurred before departure for the Philippines; 2) learning in the field during the overseas training course; and 3) post-training course reflection. Key categories and themes that emerged during each phase are summarized in Table 1, illustrated by representative quotes.

In the preparatory phase, the sequential learning activities helped the learners to challenge difficult tasks and set goals that reflect their future desires. Participants expressed willingness to make behavioral changes for a new level of study, including facing up to

their tendency to avoid difficulties. They said *"I have challenged not to run away from the tasks."* Participants chose to experience a meaningful way of learning with self-directed preparatory study that lead to excitement and satisfaction. They stated *"I was filled with joy and a sense of achievement as I challenged difficulties and discovered new findings."* *"I experienced that seeking answers and discussing the topic more thoroughly among the members of the research study group brought more satisfactory answers."* *"I've learned in depth that caused joy of study."* Participant described global nurses as their future desire: *"I want to acquire English communication skills and set a goal to accomplish."* Challenging themselves in their preparatory studies was not a uniformly positive experience. Some participants made comments such as, *"The task was too difficult to continue and I lost motivation to study,"* or *"I became anxious as I have never before."*

During learning in the field, when students were in the Philippines, they experienced the positive impact of what it means to encounter cultural differences as they were immersed in a new culture. Statements such as *"I encountered new values,"* and *"I realized I had no knowledge of others' culture and was never aware of my own culture"* were typical. They sought the meaning of being a nurse in a global perspective: *"I learned culturally congruent care linked to better patient outcomes."* Another participant stated, *"I found that it was very important to assess the real condition as a whole by being there*

and not depending on data from outside resources. Being there helped me to understand the reason why things were the way they were in reality.” They also realized the critical importance of personal connections: *“Global nursing does not mean exchange between nations but exchanges that occur between people.”*

In the post-training course reflection phase, participants reflected on changes to their sense of self. One participant stated, *“I reflected on myself about why I was anxious and realized my habitual pattern.”* Experiences of accomplishment, a deeper level of learning, and fulfillment of goals helped to motivate them to study hard for the rest of the nursing program: *“I realized what I need to accomplish my dream.”*

They described that their *challenges brought deep sense of accomplishment and motivation gain as continue to study hard to actualized their dreams that expanded through this training course.* (Table 1)

V. Discussion

Qualitative analysis of students’ reflective journals illustrated that use of active learning strategies led to gain in knowledge, critical thinking, behavioral modification, and motivation, and willingness to challenge avoidant behavior. The sequential steps of preparatory study helped learners to overcome difficult tasks and to set goals that reflect their future desires. Most participants expressed willingness to make behavioral

changes to adopt new study methods to meet higher expectations.

This study’s findings are consistent with previous studies of active learning; undergraduate nursing students showed improved abilities for self-directed problem-solving and critical thinking in addition to development in knowledge, skills and attitude domains (Ishii, Kashima, Fukahara, et al., 2012; Kong, Qin, Zhou, et al., 2013; Murad, Coto-Yglesias, Varkey, et al., 2010). This study demonstrated the efficacy of active learning strategies such as active engagement in guided discussions and group work to help students develop problem solving and critical thinking skills as in studies by Anderson & Krthwohl (2001), Blair (2004) and Nelson (2006).

The immersion experience in the Philippines provided participants with a positive experience of encountering culture differences. They reflected on their own cultural background and were better able to articulate the meaning of being a nurse in a global perspective.

Study results also indicated that overcoming difficulties to engage in active learning resulted in increased confidence and motivation. Participants’ motivation was reflected in more active classroom participations after they returned from the training course. Their experiences of accomplishment, a deeper level of learning, and fulfillment of their goals increased their self-motivation to study harder during the rest of the nursing program.

Table 1 Phases of Learning and Key Themes

Phase	Themes	Representative statements
Preparatory learning	Learning that required change in behavior.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>I did not run away from the reality and challenged myself to achieve a higher level of learning.</i>
	Learning that brings joy.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>The more committed we are as we talk within the group and seek answers within the group, the more we become motivated to learn. That makes study enjoyable.</i> ● <i>We were filled with joy and a sense of achievement as we challenge difficulties, which resulted in new findings.</i>
	Learning that develops goals for the future.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>Aiming to become a nurse with global literature who works all over the world.</i>
	Stresses associated with learning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>I am too anxious and doubt that I can do this because I have never done it before.</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>It felt too difficult to continue and I lost motivation for study.</i> 		
Learning in the field	Understanding of cultural differences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>I learned that providing culturally congruent care would result in better patient outcomes.</i> ● <i>I was able to reflect on my own ethnocentricity.</i>
	Recognition of important aspects of global nursing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>Global exchange does not mean exchange between nations but exchanges that occur between people.</i> ● <i>What I thought of global nursing is different from what I actually learned and experienced.</i>
	Need to analyze collected data critically	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>I found that it was very important to assess the real condition as a whole by being there and not depending on data from outside resource. Being there helped me to understand the reason why things were the way they were in reality.</i>
Post-training course reflective learning	Growth in sense of self	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>Challenging myself and accomplishing what achieved brought satisfaction, joy and a deep sense of accomplishment.</i> ● <i>Realized my habitual pattern.</i>
	Reflecting on significant meaning of real experiences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>The result of my research is not just what I learned, but the importance of everything I gained in the process.</i> ● <i>Realized the differences between just knowing what it is and experiencing what it is.</i>
	Forming motivation for ultimate goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>I became more interested in global nursing.</i> ● <i>I became more motivated to study harder.</i>
	Learning how to learn	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>I learned the importance of cooperation with group work</i> ● <i>I learned how to think critically.</i>

VI. Strengths and Limitations of the Study

A strength of this study is its use of first year nursing students' narratives as they prepared for, experienced and reflected on a real life cultural immersion global nursing experience. Participants' learning trajectories were described in their own words. The limitation of this study includes the results might be influenced by the researcher's personal biases and idiosyncrasies.

VII. Conclusion

The objective of this study was to analyze undergraduate nursing students' experience of active learning strategies used to prepare for a Global Nursing Training Course in the Philippines. Data from participants' reflective journal demonstrated changes in study attitudes, sense of self, and the significance of having real involvement as global nurses. Success implementation of active learning strategies takes strengths and skills of the teachers and mentors such as providing guidance and constructive feedback. Students and teachers need considerable understanding of learning processes and how they may vary in different students so that when the students become discouraged by new teaching methods to promote a higher level of learning, teachers, mentors, or peer support can be used to help these students overcome such difficulties. Although implementation of active learning strategies requires planning

and effort by both students and teachers or mentors, this study has documented benefit from starting in the early stages of the undergraduate program to maximize benefits such as critical thinking and self-reflection as students continue their nursing education.

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<実践報告>

和文要旨

研究目的：本研究の目的は、日本の某私立大学看護学部学士課程初年次に学ぶ看護学生の経験を記述する事である。2014年3月にフィリピンにて行われた国際看護研修の参加者が、研修事前学習より研修に至るまでのシーケンスによる学びの中で、どのように学びが進んだかを記述する。

研究方法：国際看護フィリピン研修に任意参加した看護学生1年生28名(19歳から35歳までの4人の男子学生と24人の女子学生)全員が本研究の参加に同意したため研究対象者とした。

結果：学習者はアクティブ・ラーニング法を用いた学習経験を通して、関連知識を増やし、批判的考察能力を高め、学習に対するモチベーションを向上させ、困難な課題を避けずにチャレンジする学習態度へ変容したことが明らかになった。事前研修より研修に至るまでのシーケンスによる学びの深化が、学習者がより高いレベルの課題を乗り越える力を高め、将来の志を果たすための目標形成を促した。

結論：国際看護学フィリピン研修の参加者らの記述したポートフォリオから、学習に対する態度の変化、自尊心の変化、そしてグローバル・ナースとして実践することの重要性を感じていることが明らかになった。アクティブ・ラーニングにおいては学習者と教育者の双方からの働きかけを必要とするが、先行研究において指摘されているとおり、学士課程教育の初期における取り組みが、学習者の批判的考察能力、振り返り考察する力を高め、初年次以降の看護教育の理解を深めることを促すと考えられる。

キーワード：アクティブ・ラーニング、国際看護、看護教育、自立的学習