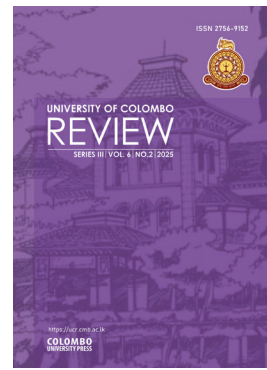


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Emotional intelligence and nursing education: A review

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ABSTRACT

The body of research on emotional intelligence (EI) in the nursing field has increased within the last 10 years. Human relationships and emotions play a crucial role in enhancing the quality of nursing care. It is essential to produce plans for helpful strategies to train nurses with high EI and achieve academic success. Undergraduate nursing students can develop emotional intelligence, enabling them to regulate their thoughts and emotions. The purpose of this narrative review is to investigate the current state of knowledge about emotional intelligence (EI) in nursing education. This research reviewed studies published in English between 2000 and 2025, sourced from a mix of search engines and databases, including PubMed, ResearchGate, Springer, ScienceDirect, and Google Scholar. Eighty articles are included in this narrative review. The findings were categorized into five themes: EI and academic achievements, EI and cognitive/clinical competences, EI and coping mechanisms, EI and professionalism, and EI and broader mental and behavioral outcomes. This literature review highlights the numerous advantages of emotional intelligence (EI) for nursing students. Various training programs designed to enhance EI have shown positive outcomes within nursing education. By synthesizing these findings, we can gain a clearer understanding of the value EI brings to nursing training.

KEYWORDS:

Nursing students, Nursing education, Emotional Intelligence, Emotional skills, Emotional competencies

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Emotional intelligence (EI) is the capacity to recognize, understand, and regulate one's own emotions while also being attuned to the emotions of others (Goleman, 2001). It comprises five core components: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills. Although intelligence quotient (IQ) has traditionally been employed to predict academic achievement, particularly in higher education, recent research emphasizes EI as a distinct and vital form of intelligence. Studies indicate that EI might be more important than IQ for success in academic and interpersonal contexts within higher education (Roso-Bas et al., 2015).

Several instruments are employed to assess emotional intelligence, including the Emotional Quotient Inventory (EQ-i), Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (MSCEIT), and the Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire (TEIQue). These tools commonly evaluate a variety of emotional intelligence traits, such as empathy, emotional awareness, and regulation. However, there is no universally accepted method to view the concept of emotional intelligence once it is understood (Iliev, 2022). Emotional intelligence explicitly encompasses two main areas: the interpersonal and intrapersonal domains (Austin et al., 2007). Higher EI is associated with better health and well-being, reduced stress and anxiety, and increased life satisfaction. These factors, in turn, enhance empathy, emotion regulation, listening skills, conflict resolution, and more visible acts of compassionate care in interpersonal relationships (Austin et al., 2007).

Emotional intelligence has also become more popular in nursing and is closely related to the field, as nursing is informed by emotional reactions. EI can impact the quality of patient care and outcomes, decision-making, critical thinking, and the overall well-being of practicing nurses (Raghubir, 2018). EI enhances nurses' flexibility, positive attitudes, and better relationships with patients and colleagues (Akerjordet & Severinsson, 2008), improves professionalism, and develops skills in solving workplace conflicts (Ezzatabadi et al., 2012). Since human relationships and emotions are vital in nursing care, they enhance the quality of care provided. Nursing education should incorporate this element of the profession to adequately prepare students for managing their own emotions and those of their patients. A comprehensive understanding of the many benefits of EI is essential for its integration into the nursing training curriculum (Foster & McCloughen, 2020; Ergin et al, 2022).

This article aims to review recent research on emotional intelligence and examine its effects on nursing students and their education. After analyzing these impacts, potential recommendations are discussed.

Methodology

The researchers completed this review by reviewing published literature, official websites, and reports and dissertations in English published between 2000 and 2025 by various government and non-governmental organizations. The scientific

literature search was conducted using keywords across the electronic databases and search engines PubMed, ResearchGate, Springer, ScienceDirect, and Google Scholar. An article was excluded if it was anonymous, a book review, a commentary, an editorial, a historical article, or written in a language other than English. This review gathers and presents data and information relevant to emotional intelligence, describes its effects on nursing education, and discusses necessary recommendations.

Results

The search identified 755 titles in the databases. After deleting duplicates and unavailable articles, 150 papers were analyzed. After title and abstract screening, followed by detailed analysis of the full papers, 80 articles met the inclusion criteria and were reviewed. To address our research aim, the findings were categorized into five themes. These themes identified how EI correlated with different aspects of nursing undergraduates, which are essential for the development of their nursing career. These themes include EI and academic achievements, EI and cognitive/clinical competencies, EI and coping mechanisms, EI and professionalism, and EI and broader mental and behavioral outcomes.

EI and academic achievements

According to the reviewed literature, there is a relation between EI and the academic achievements of nursing students. MacCann et al. (2011) suggested that higher levels of EI should predict better academic grades, while Beauvais et al. (2011, 2014) found that improving educational outcomes may be achieved by emphasizing emotion management skills and problem-focused coping (Altaweel et al., 2023; Sharon & Grinberg, 2018; Halimi et al., 2020). Senevirathna and Meegoda (2023), Roso-Bas et al. (2015), and Cheshire et al. (2015) also investigated the relationship between emotional intelligence and academic achievements.

EI and cognitive/ clinical competences

The literature indicates that the clinical competence, self-efficacy and clinical performances of nursing undergraduates have a broad impact on the quality and accuracy of clinical decisions (Jawabreh, 2024; Dou et al., 2022) and significantly associated with EI (Rice, 2013; Park & Kim, 2024; Aghabary & Khedmatizadeh, 2025). Riaz et al. (2025) and Kong et al. (2016) found that emotional intelligence positively correlates with nursing students' clinical communication skills in practice, clinical teaching (Allen et al., 2012), critical thinking (Hashish & Bajbeir, 2018), as well as with problem-solving, teamwork, self-directed learning, creativity (Hasanpour et al., 2018; Kim & Shin, 2021; Salehi et al., 2012), and managing their own emotions (Foster & McCloughen, 2020). The researchers emphasized the importance of including emotional intelligence training in healthcare curricula to

improve interpersonal skills, empathy, and resilience in clinical practice.

EI and coping mechanisms

The literature reveals that effective emotional management enables nurses to maintain their coping mechanisms and remain calm in stressful situations, thereby enhancing patient care and reducing the risk of burnout (MacCann et al., 2011; Por et al., 2011; Sánchez-Álvarez et al., 2020; Galanis et al., (2024); Xu, 2023). Miri et al. (2013) and Meng and Qi (2018) found that students with high emotional intelligence tend to be self-critical, which may lead to frustration and increased stress. Nursing students with poor self-efficacy and emotional intelligence may be more likely to experience academic failure (Guo, 2019; Huang et al., 2023; Gharetepeh et al., 2015).

EI and professionalism

The relationship between professionalism and EI is well established in the literature. Ergin et al. (2022) and Kong et al. (2016) revealed that nursing students with higher emotional intelligence are better at managing their emotions and their influence on ethical decision-making. There is a mediating effect of empathy and communication skills on nursing students' emotional intelligence and caring abilities (Yang & Wang 2023; Hajibabaei et al., 2018). Nursing programs should enable students to develop their communication and emotional intelligence. Self-esteem significantly influences nursing students' professionalism, performance, well-being, mental health, nursing care standards, and professional skills (Mruk, 2013). It also plays a crucial role in enhancing EI, as shown by studies (Bukhari et al., 2017; Bsharat, 2024; Shrestha et al., 2018; Castelino & Mendonca, 2023; Shamsaei et al., 2017).

EI and broader mental and behavioral outcomes

EI is associated with better mental and behavioral outcomes by fostering self-awareness, emotional regulation, and social skills, which then lead to more positive mental states, stronger relationships, and greater well-being. EI was positively connected to improvements in leadership and caring skills, as well as resilience, psychological empowerment, and spiritual well-being among nursing students (Benson et al., 2012; Manjusha, Soja, and Usha 2017).

Aradilla-Herrero, Tomás-Sábado, and Gómez-Benito (2014) proposed that strategies to prevent suicidal thoughts among nursing students should include methods to improve emotional coping skills. Furthermore, Aradilla-Herrero, Tomás-Sábado, and Gómez-Benito (2012) studied the differences between different academic years with regard to both emotional intelligence and death attitudes. Nabirye et al. (2024) emphasized that nursing students frequently experience feelings of anger, anxiety, and depression when engaging with patient care. They stressed the importance

of enhancing emotional intelligence before assigning students to the clinical field.

Discussion

In the literature, research studies indicate a link between EI and nursing education. MacCann et al. (2011) suggested that higher levels of EI should predict better academic outcomes, a view supported by several studies focused on nursing students. For instance, Altaweel et al. (2023), Sharon and Grinberg (2018), and Halimi et al. (2020) all reported positive correlations between EI and academic achievement within nursing education.

Further supporting this link, Beauvais et al. (2011; 2014) emphasized the importance of emotion regulation and problem-focused coping strategies as contributors to improved educational outcomes. These findings suggest that integrating emotional management training into nursing curricula could enhance student performance.

However, not all research presents a consistent picture. While Senevirathna and Meegoda (2023) identified a statistically significant yet weak positive correlation between EI and GPA, Cheshire et al. (2015) at the University of Alabama and Roso-Bas et al. (2015) at the University Hospital Son Espases, revealed that baccalaureate nursing students did not perceive a link between emotional intelligence and academic success. These mixed findings emphasize the complexity of the relationship between EI and academic achievements. Further research is needed to explore the variables that may influence this relationship in different educational and cultural contexts.

Research shows a significant connection between emotional intelligence (EI) and key clinical skills in nursing. Riaz et al. (2025) identified a strong positive link between EI and communication skills, which are vital in clinical nursing, among nursing students in Pakistan. Similarly, Kong et al. (2016) reported that higher EI enhances clinical communication skills, enabling students to communicate more effectively with patients. Allen et al. (2011) also found that EI considerably improves clinical teaching effectiveness, emphasizing the importance of EI in developing essential nursing competencies.

Critical thinking is essential for effective clinical practice and evidence-based nursing care (Hasanpour et al., 2018; Kim & Shin, 2021; Salehi et al., 2012). Kim & Shin (2021) also linked social-emotional competence, which includes EI, critical thinking, and other skills, to student performance. In Saudi Arabia, Abou Hashish and Bajbeir (2018) found a connection between EI and critical thinking using the SSEIT (Schutte Self Report Emotional Intelligence Test) tool. However, other studies (Hasanpour et al., 2018; Kaya et al., 2018) found no significant link between the two.

Healthcare students experience elevated stress associated with the interpersonal work of clinical practice. A qualitative research study was conducted at an Australian university (Foster & McCloughen, 2020) to explore the complex

interpersonal interactions that nursing students experienced with patients and their families during clinical placements. The interpersonal challenges encountered included interactions with patients or family members who were angry, aggressive, distressed, or embarrassed. Students utilized a wide range of strategies rooted in cognitive, emotional, relational, and behavioral emotional intelligence to navigate their emotions and those of others during these interactions. The researchers concluded that incorporating emotional intelligence education into healthcare curricula is essential for developing interpersonal skills, fostering empathy, and building resilience in clinical practice, thereby enabling better nursing care.

Furthermore, Rice's (2013) research in the Northeastern United States revealed a significant positive correlation between self-efficacy and clinical performance, as well as between emotional intelligence and self-efficacy. However, no direct correlation was established between emotional intelligence and clinical performance. The findings of this study emphasize the importance of enhancing clinical self-efficacy among nursing students, particularly by developing their emotional intelligence skills. Similarly, Park, Rajaguru and Kim (2024) in Korea also investigated the impact of emotional intelligence, caring efficacy, and social support on the clinical competency of nursing students, identifying emotional factors as a significant influence on this competency. Therefore, Rice (2013) and Park, Rajaguru and Kim (2014) had congruent study results.

Emotional intelligence is closely linked to decision-making within nursing education, as EI significantly impacts the quality and precision of clinical decisions. Using the "Schutte Self Report Emotional Intelligence Test" and the "clinical decision making scale", Jawabreh (2024) studied the association between EI and students' decision-making skills. The research found a significant positive correlation between clinical decision-making skills and nursing students' emotional intelligence. Furthermore, a cross-sectional observational study in China (Dou et al., 2022) found that EI scores correlated positively with clinical ability scores, specifically the branches of EI, "managing emotions" and "facilitating thought," which directly influence clinical ability.

In their cross-sectional study, Aghabarary and Khedmatizare (2025) found that clinical competence and emotional intelligence were significantly correlated, suggesting that enhancing nursing undergraduates' EI is paramount. Effective emotional management allows nurses to stay calm in stressful situations, improve patient care, and avoid burning out. The high prevalence of burnout compromises the quality of care (Galanis et al., 2024). In their study, Varghese and Anju (2018) identified a significant negative correlation between emotional intelligence and burnout among nursing students.

According to research by MacCann et al. (2011), Por et al. (2011), and Sánchez-Álvarez et al. (2020), the benefits of emotional intelligence for academic

success are connected to students' ability to manage their emotions effectively and their reduced vulnerability to stress (Xu, 2023). Conversely, Miri et al. (2013) found that students with high emotional intelligence tend to be self-critical, which may lead to frustration and increased stress. This highlights the importance of considering other stressors, such as personal differences (Miri et al., 2013). Meng and Qi (2018) also noted that emotional intelligence was negatively related to stress among nursing students training in intensive care units.

Emotional intelligence and self-efficacy play a crucial role in achieving academic success, and emotional intelligence can help explain self-efficacy, as Gharetepeh et al. (2015) concluded in their research. Nursing students with poor self-efficacy and lower levels of resilience and emotional intelligence may be more likely to experience academic failure (Guo, 2019; Huang et al., 2023).

There is a relationship between professionalism in nursing and EI (Ergin et al., 2022). Ergin et al. (2022) revealed that nursing students with higher emotional intelligence are more attuned to their emotions and their impact on ethical decision-making. Consequently, they recommended revising the nursing education curriculum to enhance students' emotional intelligence and ethical sensitivity. Kong et al. (2016) also concluded their research study in agreement with Ergin et al. (2022).

Empathy is vital in nursing because it builds trust, enhances communication, and improves the quality of care. To examine the multiple mediating effects of empathy and communication skills on nursing students' emotional intelligence and caring abilities, Yang and Wang (2023) conducted a case study, revealing that emotional intelligence influences caring ability. Hajibabaei et al. (2018) also found that nurses with empathy can better manage their emotions, and those with higher emotional intelligence are more likely to establish meaningful interactions with patients and their families. Nursing programs should enable students to develop their communication and emotional intelligence.

Self-esteem significantly influences nursing students' professionalism, performance, well-being, mental health, adherence to nursing care standards, and professional skills (Mruk, 2013). It also plays a crucial role in enhancing EI, as demonstrated by a study by Bukhari et al. (2017). The study by Bsharat (2024) found that emotional intelligence and self-esteem among fourth-year nursing students were high. Consistent with these findings, Shrestha et al. (2018), Castelino and Mendonca (2023), and Shamsaei et al. (2017) concluded that nursing students reported strong self-esteem and that self-esteem levels were linked to anxiety and EI levels. Therefore, academic staff should be aware of techniques to boost students' self-esteem and EI, thereby improving their academic achievement and overall success (Bukhari et al., 2017; Altaweel et al., 2023).

EI enhances the broader mental and behavioral outcomes of nursing students according to the literature review. Exploring the link between emotional intelligence

(EI) and suicidal risks among nursing undergraduates, Aradilla-Herrero, Tomás-Sábado, and Gómez-Benito (2014) suggested that strategies to prevent suicidal thoughts among nursing students should include methods to enhance emotional coping skills. The systematic review by Domínguez-García and Fernández-Berrocal (2018) on the connection between emotional intelligence and suicidal behavior shows that a high level of EI significantly helps protect against suicidal behavior.

Furthermore, Aradilla-Herrero, Tomás-Sábado, and Gómez-Benito (2012) examined differences in death attitudes and emotional intelligence across different academic years, as well as the connections between death perspectives and perceived emotional intelligence. As students progress through their studies, they tend to display less fear of others' death. This finding contrasts with the results of Chen et al. (2006) who discovered that students in later stages of their education experienced greater fear of others' death compared to those in earlier years.

A longitudinal study by Benson et al. (2012) on emotional intelligence, leadership and caring among undergraduate nursing students in Canada found that increases in EI were positively linked to improvements in leadership and caring skills. Likewise, a descriptive correlational study in the United States, conducted by Manjusha, Soja, and Usha (2017), demonstrated a significant relationship between emotional intelligence, resilience, psychological empowerment, and spiritual well-being among nursing students.

Furthermore, the findings of Nieto et al. (2024) highlight the benefits of emotional intelligence in educational and cognitive settings by emphasizing the negative effects of emotions and the value of teaching emotional intelligence. Similarly, Nabirye et al. (2024) highlighted that nursing students often experience feelings of anger, anxiety, and depression, which can stem from patients' family members and the distress of being unable to save a dying patient. In response to these challenges, students adopt various coping strategies, such as seeking support from peers, distancing themselves from patients, engaging in problem-solving, turning to spirituality, or taking part in activities that reduce stress.

Harrison and Fopma-Loy (2010) emphasized encouraging reflective journals, which promote emotional competence in nursing, allowing students to express their concerns prior to starting their clinical placements

Conclusion

The literature generally indicates a positive correlation between emotional intelligence (EI) and nursing education, particularly in areas such as academic achievement, clinical competence, professionalism, coping strategies, and the overall mental and behavioral outcomes of nursing students. However, some findings are inconsistent—while many studies report a strong relationship, others show only weak or no correlation between EI and nursing students' performance.

This variability may be due to differences in the types of research instruments used, as well as educational and cultural differences across communities. These mixed results imply that, although EI probably influences nursing education and academic performance, further research is necessary to understand its impact fully. Overall, this review suggests that emotional intelligence benefits nursing students and advocates for the integration of emotional intelligence training into nursing curricula.

This review has several limitations that should be acknowledged. Firstly, only articles published in English between 2000 and 2025 were included, which may have introduced language bias and excluded relevant non-English studies. The search was limited to specific databases and search engines—PubMed, ResearchGate, Springer, ScienceDirect, and Google Scholar—meaning some relevant publications indexed elsewhere, such as CINAHL or PsycINFO, might have been overlooked. Furthermore, the included studies varied considerably in design, population, and tools used to measure emotional intelligence, which hindered the ability to compare results or establish causal relationships.

Recommendations

This review indicates that emotional intelligence skills can be developed. So, more emphasis should be placed on their development. They should also be incorporated into the nursing curriculum. Including emotional intelligence topics in guidance and counseling programs will help students improve their emotional intelligence and enhance their awareness, expression, regulation, and application of emotions, as well as their ability to understand and influence others' feelings. Reflective journals can also be used to promote emotional competence in nursing. This will strengthen their intrapersonal and interpersonal relationships and communication skills both within and outside the university, improve their academic performance, and help them become nurses with exemplary caring attitudes.

Future research should aim to fill the gaps identified in this review by employing more rigorous and standardized methods. Longitudinal and experimental studies are essential to better understand the causal relationship between emotional intelligence and various aspects of nursing education, such as academic achievement, clinical competence, and professional development. Researchers should also employ validated and comparable EI measurement tools to enhance consistency across studies.

Conflict of Interest

The authors have no conflict of interest to declare.

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