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### Effectiveness of reflective journaling on clinical decision-making skills among nursing students

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#### Abstract

**Introduction:** Clinical decision-making is a critical skill for nursing students, influencing patient outcomes and professional competence. Reflective journaling, a structured method of self-reflection, enhance this skill by promoting critical thinking and self-awareness. This quasi-experimental study examines the effectiveness of reflective journaling on nursing students' clinical decision-making abilities.

**Objectives:** 1.To assess the effectiveness of reflective journaling on clinical decision-making skills.2. To compare decision-making abilities between students who use reflective journaling and those who do not.

**Materials and Methods:** Quasi Experimental research design is used for the study.40BSc Nursing students who met inclusion criteria were selected conveniently and allotted in both experimental(n=20) and control group(n=20). Clinical decision making in nursing scale (CDMNS)was used to measure the clinical decision-making skill. Students in the intervention group maintained a daily reflective journal for 6 weeks. The control group continue with their regular training without journaling. After 6 weeks, CDMNS was re-administered to both groups.

**Results:** The study revealed there was a significant difference ( $p<0.05$ ) in the clinical decision making skill after the intervention in experimental group. Hence the intervention was effective in increasing clinical decision making skill.

**Conclusion:** The result of the current study demonstrates reflective journaling improves the clinical decision making skills in nursing students

**Keywords:** Reflective journaling, clinical decision-making skills, critical thinking, self awareness

#### Introduction

Clinical decision-making is a fundamental competency for nursing students, directly impacting patient safety, quality of care, and professional confidence. Effective decision-making in clinical settings requires a combination of theoretical knowledge, critical thinking, self-reflection, and practical experience. However, nursing students often face challenges in developing these skills due to limited clinical exposure, high-pressure environments, and the complexity of real-world healthcare scenarios. Reflective journaling is a structured method of self-reflection that encourages students to analyse their experiences, identify strengths and weaknesses, and enhance their critical thinking abilities. By engaging in reflective writing, students can systematically evaluate their clinical decisions, gain deeper insights into their reasoning processes, and improve their future decision-making. Despite its potential benefits, limited research has explored the effectiveness of reflective journaling as an educational strategy in nursing education.

#### Objective

To assess the effectiveness of reflective journaling on clinical decision making skills among nursing students  
To compare the post-test clinical decision making skill between the experimental and control groups

#### Materials and Methods

Quasi Experimental two group pre test –post test research design was adopted for the study. The study was conducted in clinical training areas of private hospital in Trivandrum district where fourth year BSc nursing students undergo clinical rotations. The population of the study was a fourth year BSc Nursing Students in the private nursing college. A total of 40 students were selected for the study by convenience sampling technique. Students were assigned to either in the intervention group n=20(who maintain reflective journals) or control group n=20 (who do not engage in reflective journaling) based on clinical rotation schedules to avoid disruption in training. Criteria for Inclusion criteria were 1) Fourth-year nursing students enrolled in clinical training.2) Willing to participate in the study.3)Able to maintain reflective journals for the study duration.Exclusion criteria were 1)Students with prior training in reflective journaling.2)Students absent from clinical rotations for more than 2 days. Clinical decision making in nursing scale is used to assess the Decision-Making skill. It is a 40 item validated tool which consists of four domains. The domains were 1.search for alternatives 2)canvassing objectives and values 3) Evaluation of

consequences 4) Assimilation of new information. It is a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree). Higher scores indicate better clinical decision-making skills. Data collection was done after getting informed consent and well explained participant informed sheet was obtained from the study participants. Pre test was conducted to all the students in both experimental and control group with the clinical decision making in nursing scale (CDMNS). The intervention was given to the nursing students in the experimental group. The experimental group maintained the daily reflective journals for 6 weeks during clinical rotations documenting their clinical experiences and decision-making processes on every day with date. Each journal entry followed by six steps (Based on Gibbs Reflective cycle) 1) 1. Description: What happened? 2) Feelings: What were you thinking and feeling? 3) 3.

Evaluation: What was good and bad about the experience? 4) Analysis: What sense can you make of the situation? 5) Conclusion: What else could you have done? 6. Action Plan: How will you improve in future situations? The control group continue with their regular training without journaling. After 6 weeks, CDMNS was re-administered to both groups. Analysis was done using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Description of characteristics of students based on demographic variables. Paired t test (with in groups) was used to Compare pre-test and post-test scores within each group to determine improvement. Independent t-test Used to compare post-test scores between the experimental and control groups to assess the impact of reflective journaling

**Results**

**Table 1:** Frequency and percentage distribution of Socio Demographic variables

Demographic variable	category	Experimental Group (n=20)	Control Group (n=20)	Total (N=40)
Age (in years)	21-22	12(60%)	11(55%)	23(57.5%)
	23-24	8(40%)	9(45%)	17(42.5%)
Gender	Male	4(20%)	3(15%)	7(17.5%)
	female	16(80%)	17(85%)	33(82.5%)
Academic Performance	Below 60%	3(15%)	4(20%)	7(17.5%)
	60%-75%	12(60%)	11(55%)	23(57.5%)
	Above 75%	5(25%)	5(25%)	10(25%)
Preferred Learning Style	visual	9(45%)	8(40%)	17(42.5%)
	Auditory	6(30%)	6(30%)	12(30%)
	kinesthetic	5(25%)	6(30%)	11(27.5)

The majority of students fall within the 21-22 years age group (57.5%), with a slightly lower proportion in the 23-24 years category (42.5%).The experimental and control groups have similar age distributions, ensuring comparability. Female students dominate the sample, comprising 82.5% of the total participants, while males represent 17.5%.The gender distribution is fairly balanced between both groups, with slightly more females in the control group (85%) compared to the experimental group (80%).The highest proportion of students (57.5%) have a

GPA between 60-75%, indicating average academic performance.25% of students in both groups have a high GPA (above 75%), while 17.5% fall into the below 60% category. Visual learning is the most common preference (42.5% of students), followed by auditory (30%) and kinesthetic (27.5%) learning styles. The distribution across the experimental and control groups is relatively similar, ensuring that learning style does not significantly influence the study outcome.

**Table 2:** Significance of Pre-test and Post-test Mean Scores of Clinical Reasoning Skills Within Experimental and Control Groups

Group	Mean	Mean Difference	SD	t-stat	t-critical	Significance level
Experimental (Journaling)	130.45	39.35	2.81	-62.52	2.09	P<0.05
Control (No Journaling)	117.25	4.20	0.52	-35.90	2.09	P<0.05

Both groups show significant improvement as the t-statistic is greater than the t-critical value. The experimental group (Journaling) has a much larger mean difference (39.35)

compared to the control group (4.20), indicating a stronger effect of journaling on post-test scores.The p-value is < 0.05, confirming that the results are statistically significant.

**Table 3:** Significance of the Difference in Post-Test Clinical Reasoning Skill Scores Between Experimental and Control Groups

Comparison	Mean (experimental)	Mean (control)	Mean difference	SD(Experimental)	SD (Control)	t stat	t critical	Significance level
Pretest (Exp vs Ctrl)	130.45	117.25	13.20	4.88	2.69	10.59	2.09	p<0.05
Post -Test ExpvsCtrl)	169.80	121.45	48.35	6.63	2.70	30.20	2.09	p<0.05

The pre-test scores show a statistically significant difference (p< 0.05) between the experimental and control groups, indicating that the experimental group started with a higher baseline. The post-test scores show an even greater

significant difference (p< 0.05), suggesting that the journaling intervention had a strong effect. The mean difference increased from 13.20 to 48.35, showing that the experimental group improved much more than the control

group.

### Discussion

This study aims in how reflective journal affects clinical decision-making skills in nursing students. The results clearly show that students who kept journals improved much more than those who did not. Students in the journaling group started with an average score of 130.45, which increased to 169.80 after six weeks. In contrast, students in the non-journaling group only improved slightly, from 117.25 to 121.45. This shows that journaling had a big impact on decision-making skills. The statistical tests also support this. The experimental group had a much higher improvement than the control group. This means that journaling is a highly effective method for improving clinical decision-making skills.

The statistical analysis further supports these results. The t-statistic for the experimental group (-62.52) was significantly greater than the critical value (2.09), with a p-value < 0.05, indicating strong statistical significance. The control group also showed statistical significance (t = -35.90,  $p < 0.05$ ), but the mean improvement was significantly lower. This highlights that while standard training contributes to some improvement in decision-making skills, reflective journaling has a much stronger impact.

The findings of this study align with previous research suggesting that reflective practice enhances clinical reasoning and decision-making skills in nursing students. Reflective journaling, particularly using structured models such as Gibbs' Reflective Cycle, encourages deeper cognitive engagement, helping students analyse their experiences, assess alternative approaches, and apply theoretical knowledge to real-world scenarios. Similar studies have demonstrated that reflective journaling leads to improved problem-solving abilities and enhances students' confidence in their clinical judgment

### Implications for Nursing

The results of this study have important implications for nursing education and clinical training programs. The significant improvement in clinical decision-making skills among students who maintained reflective journals suggests that incorporating structured reflection into nursing curriculum can be highly beneficial. It promotes self-directed learning and critical analysis of clinical experiences. Educators should consider integrating reflective journaling as a routine practice in clinical training to enhance students' analytical skills, self-awareness, and ability to make informed clinical decisions. By encouraging students to critically engage with their experiences, educators can help them develop a lifelong habit of reflection, which is essential for continuous learning and professional growth in the healthcare field.

### Limitations and Future Research

Despite its strengths, this study has some limitations. The sample size was relatively small (N=40), which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Future studies with larger samples across multiple institutions could provide more evidence of the effectiveness of reflective journaling in nursing education.

Additionally, the study relied on self-reported data from reflective journals, which may introduce a degree of subjectivity. Future research could incorporate qualitative methods such as interviews or focus group discussions to gain deeper insights into students' experiences with reflective journaling and its impact on their learning.

Lastly, a longer follow-up period could help assess the long-term impact of reflective journaling on clinical decision-making skills. Future research could explore whether the benefits of reflective journaling persist as students transition into professional nursing roles.

### Conclusion

This study shows that reflective journaling is a powerful tool for improving clinical decision-making skills in nursing students. The students who used journals improved significantly compared to those who did not. Adding reflective journaling to nursing education can help students think more critically, make better decisions, and become more skilled professionals. Educators should consider making journaling a regular practice to better prepare students for their future careers in healthcare. The present study aimed to assess the effectiveness of reflective journaling on clinical decision-making skills among fourth-year BSc nursing students. The findings provide strong evidence that maintaining a reflective journal significantly enhances clinical decision-making abilities compared to standard training without journaling.

### Conflict of Interest

Not available

### Financial Support

Not available

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