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Characteristics of effective nurse educators from Thai nursing students' perspectives

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Abstract

Background: Effective nurse educators will improve students' performance. Therefore, examining the characteristics of an effective nurse educator is essential, especially from nursing students' perspectives, which will provide an additional point of view to improve the teachers' quality.

Objectives: This research aimed to identify nursing students' opinions regarding the characteristics of effective nurse educators and to compare those characteristics according to age, year of study, and cumulative grade point average.

Methods: A descriptive quantitative design was used. Data were collected from 400 nursing students in Thailand using a validated questionnaire. Descriptive statistics, *t*-tests, and *F*-tests were used for data analysis.

Results: The overall mean scores of effective nurse educators' characteristics based on students' perspectives were 4.36 (*SD* = 0.45). Subject expertise was the most essential characteristic of the effective nurse educators (Mean = 4.45, *SD* = 0.47), followed by relational expertise (Mean = 4.44, *SD* = 0.52), personality (Mean = 4.36, *SD* = 0.45), and teaching-related behavior (Mean = 4.33, *SD* = 0.46). The results also showed that participants with different cumulative grade point averages had no different views on the characteristics of effective nurse educators (*p* > 0.05). However, participants of different ages and years of study had significantly different perspectives on the characteristics of effective nurse educators (*p* < 0.05).

Conclusion: The study offers necessary information regarding the essential characteristics of effective nurse educators. Therefore, nurse educators can use the study results to improve their desired characteristics. In addition, faculty development programs may be planned to help nurse educators improve these characteristics.

Keywords

higher education; nursing students; nurse educator; teacher; Thailand

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Background

Due to the change in the educational system and the current unpredictable situation from the COVID-19 pandemic, nurse educators need to adjust their instruction methods to ensure the quality of nursing graduates (Aragasi & Pangandaman, 2021; Grech, 2021). Similarly, because of the increasingly complex health care needs, the expectations of graduates are evolving rapidly in this era (Keating et al., 2021). Effective nurse educators have been essential (Lowrie & Jorgensen, 2016) because they will enhance students' performance compared to ineffective nurse educators (Narayan, 2018). Nurse educators play an essential role in achieving nursing students' learning outcomes. Therefore, nurse educators should have core competencies to guarantee that they have the necessary knowledge and abilities to assist students throughout the educational process (Fitzgerald et al., 2020).

According to the National League for Nursing (NLN), effective nurse educators should have eight core competencies: 1) facilitation of learning, 2) enhancement of learner growth and socialization, 3) using measurement and evaluation methods, 4) taking part in curriculum design and program evaluation, 5) being a leader, 6) continually improving teaching quality, 7) conducting research, and 8) operating inside the educational setting (National League for Nursing, 2012).

A previous integrative review reported that nurse educators' expertise and interpersonal abilities are appreciated by nursing students more than their personality features (Labrague et al., 2020). This finding may be because the nursing profession cannot work alone, but nurses need to work with other health care professionals. Therefore, it is no doubt that previous studies reported that the ability to build a relationship with other people was a valued characteristic for effective nurse educators (Collier, 2018; Factor & de Guzman, 2017). Similarly, an integrative review by Collier (2018)

reported that competence, capacity to build interpersonal relationships, and specific personality attributes are all characteristics of clinical nurse educators. However, the most valuable skill is creating interpersonal ties, whereas approachability is the most crucial personality attribute for successful clinical educators.

In addition, the critical point is that nurse educators teach nursing students in clinical and non-clinical settings. However, [Ilic et al. \(2016\)](#) reported that previous studies concentrated more on identifying characteristics of effective clinical health educators but less on such characteristics in a non-clinical setting. In 2011, previous research explored the role model behavior of Thai nurse educators using self-evaluation ([Klunklin et al., 2011](#)). It was reported that Thai nurse educators highly perceived their role model behaviors. Furthermore, when considering each subscale (including respect for students, high-energy and high-quality instructional activities, demonstrating the importance of the nursing profession, social propriety, and ongoing career development), the study results showed that each subscale also was high ([Klunklin et al., 2011](#)). However, the prior study's limitation was that it employed self-evaluation measures. As a result, the results may be skewed. Therefore, to fulfill this knowledge gap, additional study is needed.

It is interesting to examine the characteristics of being a quality nurse educator from nursing students' point of view both in the clinical setting and in the classroom context. An effective nurse educator has been defined as a person who can guide students toward achieving their clinical goals ([Biftu et al., 2018](#)). In this study, the conceptual framework of effective teacher characteristics in higher education proposed by [Calaguas \(2013\)](#) was used as it covered clinical and non-clinical settings with a particular focus on students' perspectives. Through the exploratory factor analysis, [Calaguas \(2013\)](#) revealed four components of effective educators, including 1) teaching-related behavior, 2) relational expertise, 3) subject expertise, and 4) personality ([Calaguas, 2013](#)). To our knowledge, this is the first study that uses this instrument to measure Thai nursing students. Thus, our study aimed to examine effective nurse educators' characteristics from learners' perspectives.

In addition, based on a literature review, it was found that students with different demographic factors, including age, years of the study, and cumulative Grade Point Averages (GPA), reported their perceptions of effective educators' characteristics differently ([Al-Busaidi et al., 2016](#); [Limsuthiwannpum, 2012](#); [Panican et al., 2020](#)). Therefore, this study also aimed to compare whether nursing students of different ages, years of the study, and cumulative grade point average have significant differences in their perception regarding the characteristics of effective nurse educators. It is expected that the study's findings would help reflect on the nurse educator's awareness and comparison of reality with what students expect, which will help nurse educators improve themselves to be more effective.

Methods

Study Design

This study employed a descriptive research design.

Samples/ Participants

The study population comprised 14,642 bachelor's nursing students studying in 30 colleges in Thailand in 2021. The sample size was calculated using the G*Power program ([Lakens, 2013](#)) by specifying effect size = 0.25, significance level = 0.05, and power = 0.95 based on a previous study ([Panican et al., 2020](#)). There were 400 bachelor's nursing students included in this study selected using stratified random sampling.

Instruments

The instrument used in this research was a questionnaire of the effective teacher characteristics developed by [Calaguas \(2013\)](#). The instrument was developed from the result of the Exploratory Factor Analysis using the responses of 497 college students in the Philippines. It showed four significant categories for effective educators: teaching-related behavior, relational expertise, subject matter expertise, and personality. First, a desire for teaching, adherence to school standards, and acceptable conduct for all teaching processes, such as serving as a positive role model for students, excitement, or encouraging students to examine teachings, were teaching-related behaviors. Second, the capacity to develop and maintain connections was referred to as relational expertise. Third, being educated about the subject matter, providing well-prepared lessons, being an expert, demonstrating comprehension, and the capacity to teach a variety of subjects were all examples of subject matter expertise. Finally, having charm, displaying elegance under pressure, and having an outgoing personality were personality traits ([Calaguas, 2013](#)).

With the developer's permission, the tool was translated from the English version to the Thai version and asked five experts in education and language to check the content validity and correctness of the language. The content validity index was 0.6-1.00 (Total = 0.83), and the Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient was 0.98. The questionnaire was composed of 67 items in four components: 1) teaching-related behavior 45 items, 2) 10 items of subject expertise, 3) 7 items of relational expertise, and 4) 5 items of personality. The response categories for each item were given a five-point scale, ranking from at least agree to agree strongly.

Data Collection

The online data collection was carried out through google forms by the first author from July to August 2021 in 30 nursing colleges in Thailand. Research assistants were asked to recruit participants from each college and contacted eligible participants to complete the questionnaire.

Data Analysis

Statistical Package for the Social Sciences for Windows (SPSS) version 28 was used to analyze all of the data. For the demographic analysis, descriptive statistics were employed. Mean and standard of deviation were used to calculate nursing students' opinions on the effective characteristics of nurse educators. The *t*-tests and *F*-tests were used to compare nursing students' views on characteristics related to effective nurse educators classified by age, gender, year level, and cumulative grade point average. Before testing the *t*-tests and *F*-tests, all data were evaluated for their assumptions. In

addition, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov was tested to examine the normal distribution with a result of 0.20.

Ethical Considerations

The Naresuan University Regional Research Ethics Committee approved this study protocol. The informed consent was presented on the first page of the online survey. The study purposes were explained to the samples, and confidentiality was ensured. All eligible students were invited to take part in the study. There were no coercion and penalties for non-participation.

Results

Demographic Data of the Participants

The response rate of the participants was 100%. Most participants were female (95.75%), aged 21-25 years (58.25%), second-year students (40.75%), with a 2.51-3.00 overall grade point average (51.25%).

Effective Nurse Educators' Characteristics from Nursing Students' Views

The overall mean scores of effective nurse educators' characteristics of nursing students were 4.36 ($SD = 0.45$). In

addition, nursing students rated the subject expertise as the most essential characteristic of effective nurse educators ($\bar{X} = 4.45$, $SD = 0.47$), followed by relational expertise ($\bar{X} = 4.44$, $SD = 0.52$), personality ($\bar{X} = 4.36$, $SD = 0.45$), and teaching-related behavior ($\bar{X} = 4.33$, $SD = 0.46$) (Table 1).

Table 1 Descriptive statistics for effective teacher characteristic categories from nursing students' perspectives ($n = 400$)

Characteristics	\bar{X}	SD	Rank
Subject expertise	4.45	0.47	1
Relational expertise	4.44	0.52	2
Personality	4.36	0.45	3
Teaching-related behavior	4.33	0.46	4
Total	4.36	0.45	

Comparison of the Perspectives of Nursing Students Classified by Age, Academic Year, and Cumulative GPA

Nursing students aged 21-30 years old rated the following characteristics of effective nurse educators significantly higher than nursing students aged equal or less than 20 years old on two components: teaching-related behavior ($p = 0.02$) and subject expertise ($p = 0.01$), whereas relational expertise and personality were not differently rated ($p = 0.15$, $p = 0.93$, respectively) (Table 2).

Table 2 Comparison of mean scores for each category for the three age groups ($n = 400$)

Characteristics	Age less than 20 years			Age 21–25 years			Age 26-30 years			F	p -value
	\bar{X}	SD	Rank	\bar{X}	SD	Rank	\bar{X}	SD	Rank		
Teaching-related behavior	4.26	0.48	4	4.37	0.44	3	4.45	0.35	3	3.584*	0.02
Subject expertise	4.37	0.49	2	4.50	0.45	1	4.60	0.39	2	4.154*	0.01
Relational expertise	4.39	0.53	1	4.47	0.52	2	4.65	0.41	1	1.891	0.15
Personality	4.31	0.52	3	4.31	0.55	4	4.38	0.60	4	0.071	0.93

* $p \leq 0.05$

Senior, junior, and sophomores nursing students rated the following characteristics of effective nurse educators significantly higher than first-year students: teaching-related behavior ($p = 0.001$), subject expertise ($p = 0.001$), and relational expertise ($p = 0.037$), whereas personality was not

different ($p = 0.061$) (Table 3). In addition, there were no significant differences for nursing students with different grade point averages regarding the rating for characteristics of effective nurse educators (Table 4).

Table 3 Comparison of mean scores for the four years of study groups in each category ($n = 400$)

Characteristics	First year			Second year			Third year			Fourth year			F	p -value
	\bar{X}	SD	Rank	\bar{X}	SD	Rank	\bar{X}	SD	Rank	\bar{X}	SD	Rank		
Teaching-related behavior	4.03	0.51	4	4.28	0.43	4	4.42	0.45	3	4.38	0.46	3	5.637***	0.001
Subject expertise	4.12	0.52	3	4.41	0.45	2	4.52	0.45	1	4.52	0.48	1	5.385***	0.001
Relational expertise	4.16	0.53	2	4.42	0.50	1	4.51	0.55	2	4.46	0.52	2	2.853*	0.037
Personality	4.17	0.52	1	4.33	0.51	3	4.40	0.50	4	4.23	0.60	4	2.477	0.061

* $p \leq 0.05$; ** $p \leq 0.01$; *** $p \leq 0.001$

Table 4 Comparison of mean scores for the four GPA groups in each category ($n = 400$)

Characteristics	GPA 2.01-2.50			GPA 2.51-3.00			GPA 3.01-3.50			GPA 3.51-4.00			F	p -value
	\bar{X}	SD	Rank	\bar{X}	SD	Rank	\bar{X}	SD	Rank	\bar{X}	SD	Rank		
Teaching-related behavior	4.38	0.69	3	4.34	0.45	3	4.30	0.44	3	4.25	0.58	3	0.605	0.61
Subject expertise	4.47	0.49	2	4.44	0.47	2	4.46	0.47	1	4.47	0.51	2	0.075	0.97
Relational expertise	4.50	0.53	1	4.45	0.50	1	4.40	0.55	2	4.53	0.57	1	0.666	0.57
Personality	4.34	0.58	4	4.33	0.52	4	4.27	0.53	4	4.29	0.65	4	0.402	0.75

Discussion

Nursing students in this study perceived that all characteristics are important for being effective nurse educators. In addition, when categorized in each dimension, the study results showed that essential characteristics of effective nurse educators from high to low are the subject expertise, relational expertise, personality, and teaching-related behavior. The results were consistent with the [Office of the Higher Education Commission \(2017\)](#), which has established recommendations for instructors in higher education to improve the quality of their teaching. They pointed out that the components of teaching quality comprised three parts: 1) knowledge (composed of two dimensions: expert in their teaching areas and pedagogy); 2) competencies (consist of four dimensions: creating and arranging practical learning activities for learners, successfully executing learning activities, improving the learning environment and supporting learners' learning, and assessing and evaluating learners' learning outcomes and providing constructive comments; 3) values (comprise two dimensions: values of instructor professional development and continuous self-improvement, and upholding the professional ethics of instructors). The study results also were consistent with a previous study investigated by [Ilic et al. \(2016\)](#), which showed that the three highest-ranked attributes of good health educators as perceived by students were knowledge base, enthusiasm, and clarity. In addition, [Niederriter et al. \(2017\)](#) reported that nursing students felt more confident and comprehended lessons better while studying with nurse educators who had a trustworthy connection, expertise or knowledge, coach, and role model.

The subject expertise was ranked as the most crucial key. The study results may be because teaching and learning of the nursing profession require a specific professional science body of knowledge. Therefore, nurse educators must have superb teaching and clinical skills that need up-to-date knowledge of changes in disease and medical advancement in nursing ([Soroush et al., 2021](#)). In the context of Thailand, the study findings were congruent with a qualitative study conducted in Thailand by [Charoensuk et al. \(2019\)](#), which reported that Thai nurse educators should be prepared to have five key competencies, including 1) nursing competencies, 2) pedagogy competencies, 3) personal development competencies, 4) ethical and moral competencies, and 5) research and academic services competencies. It can be explained that Thai nurse educators have significant responsibilities in teaching nursing students in health care settings, which are more complex than in the past. Therefore, Thai nurse educators must advance their competencies related to specialty areas to improve their abilities in guiding nursing students ([Samai, 2015](#)). In addition, nurse educators must also function as both a nurse and a teacher. As a result, Thai nurse educators must possess nursing and teaching skills ([Charoensuk et al., 2019](#)).

The relational expertise ranked second. This study result was in line with the previous study in Spain ([Martínez-Linares et al., 2019](#)), which reported that approachability and interpersonal skills were two crucial characteristics that nurse educators should have. Furthermore, they explained that these characteristics could contribute to establishing trust and

comfort, which can enhance the learning experiences of nursing students ([Martínez-Linares et al., 2019](#)).

Regarding teaching-related behavior and personality, the findings of this study reported that they were in the third and fourth ranks. That meant both actions and traits of nurse educators were viewed as components of good educators. A previous qualitative study by [Khan et al. \(2021\)](#) identified brilliance in the teaching, respect for students, autonomy, good communication, and cognitive and emotional traits were among the attributes of nurse educators in Sindh, Pakistan, as perceived by nursing students. For Thai nurse educators, [Charoensuk et al. \(2019\)](#) revealed that effective communication, creativity, critical reasoning, leadership, teamwork, lifelong learning, role model, and Thai citizenship were among the eight sub-competencies that Thai nurse educators should be qualified for improving their personality and teaching-related behavior.

The results also showed that nursing students aged 21 – 30 years rated the following characteristics of effective nurse educators significantly higher than nursing students aged equal or less than 20 years old: teaching-related behavior and subject expertise, whereas relational expertise and personality were not different. For example, [Ilic et al. \(2016\)](#) reported that students paid attention to teaching behaviors because they want excellent role models. Similarly, a previous study by [Panican et al. \(2020\)](#) reported that nursing students in different age groups perceived the characteristics of effective clinical nurse teachers in different ways. In addition, [Reising et al. \(2018\)](#) said that nursing students showed that the most wanted clinical nursing educators were well-versed in and specialists in clinical units and those who were patient, creative, enthusiastic, and organized.

Also, senior, junior, and sophomores nursing students rated the following characteristics of effective nurse educators significantly higher than freshmen nursing students: teaching-related behavior, subject expertise, and relational expertise, whereas personality was not different. These findings were congruent with a previous study conducted by [Al-Busaidi et al. \(2016\)](#). Compared to senior, junior, and sophomore students, first-year students favored improving the learning environment by having successful instructors with fascinating personalities and instructional qualities. It might be because freshmen students face many new challenges during their transition between school and university. As a result, they need more support from educators to pass through this transitional stage.

Besides, there were no significant differences for nursing students with different grade point averages regarding the rating for effective nurse educators' characteristics. The results were inconsistent with the previous study of [Al-Busaidi et al. \(2016\)](#), which investigated the perspectives of Turkish and Omani students on effective instructors' characteristics. They reported no significant differences in their views based on grade point average. They claimed that the insignificant differences might result from grade grouping, but confirmation of the study results from future research requires. In addition, the results were inconsistent with the previous study by [Limsuthiwanpum \(2012\)](#), which found that when comparing the overall scores of teachers' desirable characteristics among four groups of students with different learning achievements, the differences were statistically significant. Students in the high-achieving group rated higher teachers' desirable

characteristics than the low-achieving student group. The findings of this study may be because the context of the participants is different, as the participants in the study by Limsuthiwanpum (2012) were accounting students, whereas participants in this study were nursing students.

Limitations of the Study

The limitations of this study may be a survey design. Although participants from across areas of Thailand completed the study, it may need a qualitative research design for in-depth information. In addition, the results of this study were based on students' perceptions and self-report data. Therefore, future research using other instruments to measure the characteristics of effective nursing educators is needed. However, this study provides valuable information that nurse educators can consider in all contexts regarding strengthening the practical characteristics of nurse educators.

Implications of the Study

The findings of this study may help nursing education administrators plan and develop nurse educators' effective characteristics. Nursing students reported that nurse educators should be experts in the subjects they teach. Therefore, nursing education administrators may send them short course training programs to improve their specific knowledge and teaching skills in each area, such as pediatric nursing or adult nursing. For the ability to build relationships with others and on personality aspects, there may be activities or projects that allow teachers to participate in activities together, both formal and informal meetings. Instructors can also use this information to develop characteristics for teaching and learning at the higher education level. For instance, they may self-study or attend a training program in various courses related to their areas or even find a role model for effective nursing educators. Furthermore, future research to develop competencies of effective nursing educators is needed. Finally, these findings can inspire other nursing schools worldwide to prepare faculty development programs that can enhance the practical characteristics of nurse educators.

Conclusion

The study results revealed a rating of successful nursing instructors' traits as considered by nursing students, ranging from high to low: the subject expertise, relational expertise, personality, and teaching-related behavior. Ranking for each component of characteristics perceived by nursing students of different ages and years of study was significantly different. However, there were no significant differences for nursing students with different grade point averages regarding the rating for characteristics of effective teachers at the higher education level.

Declaration of Conflicting Interest

The authors declared no conflict of interest in this study.

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None.

Authors' Contributions

All authors contributed to the study conceptualization, methodology, article search, data analysis, writing, and manuscript editing and approved the article's final version.

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Data Availability

The datasets generated and analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

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