

# Effect of Nursing Students' Caring Character and Gratitude Disposition on Nursing Professionalism

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## Abstract

**Background/Objectives:** The objective of this descriptive research study was to determine effects of caring character and gratitude disposition on nursing professionalism of nursing students.

**Methods/Statistical analysis:** Data were collected from January 10, 2022 to January 23, 2022 using self-reported questionnaires from 110 students in the first to fourth years of nursing education at two universities. Collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, t-test, analysis of variance, Pearson's correlation coefficients, and multiple linear regression using the SPSS WINDOW 25.0 program.

**Findings:** Regression analysis revealed that caring character ( $\beta=.33$ ,  $p=.001$ ) and gratitude disposition ( $\beta=.26$ ,  $p=.005$ ) were factors significantly affecting nursing professionalism, with a total explanatory power of 24.9%.

**Improvements/Applications:** To establish and strengthen nursing students' proper nursing professionalism, it is necessary to open courses related to caring character and gratitude disposition with the development of extra-curricular programs for nursing students.

**Keywords:** *Nursing Student, Caring Character, Gratitude Disposition, Nursing Professionalism*

## Introduction

Nursing is an applied science with a practical philosophy. The purpose of nursing education is

to enable nursing students to acquire professional knowledge and skills with the capacity to care for patients after graduation [1]. In order to achieve this goal, character education and academic guidance are essential. Good character is an essential element in patient nursing. It is the foundation for establishing nursing professionalism. It plays a very important role in determining the quality of nursing care for patients by influencing the behavior of nurses in the future [2]. A caring-character based on respect for human beings is the core of care [3]. Caring is

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a universal human behavior that is essential for human growth, development, and survival. It is also an important element of nursing and the core of nursing education and training [4]. It is an essential element for nursing students to efficiently perform their roles as professional nurses [5]. It has been reported that caring character can improve as the academic year increases [6]. Caring character can be cultivated through intentional learning, feedback, and repetition [7].

Gratitude is the emotion of feeling grateful for the value and meaning of kindness given by others [8]. It is regarded as a fundamental virtue that transcends time and culture to this day [9]. Gratitude disposition is a cognitive and emotional response in which an individual acknowledges the contribution of others and those around him and feels grateful for the achievement of a positive experience or result with a relatively persistent and stable emotion. It has been found that people with high gratitude disposition are positive with a high life satisfaction, flexible interpersonal relationships, and pro-social behaviors [10]. Rather than avoiding problems when facing difficult situations, these traits can act as a factor to find and reinterpret positive meanings in stressful situations and utilize internal resources to help them grow [11], contributing to the formation of a nursing professionalism with a positive impact.

In addition, nursing professionalism is the sum total of beliefs, ideas, and impressions about nursing as a profession. It is a systemized view of nursing and a professional-conscious view of the nursing activity process or position of the person in charge of nursing [12]. Through positive nursing professionalism, professional values of nurses

and their own identity for nursing are formed [13]. Thus, environmental factors and personal factors that can affect the knowledge and experiences of students according to social changes and influence nursing professionalism should be taken into account. It is necessary to identify various variables that influence nursing professionalism. A previous study on nursing professionalism of nursing students has shown that positive thinking and self-esteem can affect nursing professionalism [14] and that high satisfaction with the clinical practice education environment is positive for the formation of nursing professionalism among students [15]. Nursing professionalism with positive also have higher satisfaction with their jobs, higher nursing job performance, and higher organizational commitment [16].

Therefore, this study was to determine effects of caring character and gratitude disposition on nursing professionalism of nursing students.

## Methods

### 1. Research design

This was a descriptive research study to determine effects of nursing students' caring character and gratitude disposition on nursing professionalism.

### 2. Sample and data collection

This study was conducted from January 10, 2022 to January 23, 2022 for 1st to 4th graders enrolled in the Department of Nursing at two universities in Chungbuk and Jeonnam. Data collection was carried out after voluntary consent for research participation was obtained, including information on the research and disadvantages of participating

in this research. It was conducted online using a structured questionnaire.

### **3. Research tools**

#### **3.1 Caring character**

Kim [3] has used a tool developed for nursing students. The caring character scale of this tool was developed with eight sub-factors having a total of 51 items. The higher the score indicating a higher caring character of nursing students. At the time of tool development, Cronbach's  $\alpha$  was 0.96. In this study, Cronbach's  $\alpha$  was 0.95.

#### **3.2 Gratitude disposition**

The Gratitude Questionnaire (GQ-6) developed by McCullough et al. [10] was used in the Korean version of the Gratitude Disposition Scale, which was revised by Kwon et al. [17]. It consisted of a total of 6 items. The higher the score indicating a higher gratitude disposition. In the study by Kwon et al. [17], reliability was demonstrated by a Cronbach's  $\alpha$  of 0.85. In the present study, its Cronbach's  $\alpha$  was 0.85.

#### **3.3 Nursing professionalism**

Measurements were made using a tool developed by Yeun et al. [12]. This tool consisted of a total of 29 items in five sub-areas. The higher the score indicating more positive nursing professionalism. The reliability at the time of tool development was Cronbach's  $\alpha$  of 0.92, and in this study Cronbach's  $\alpha$  was 0.92.

### **4. Data analysis**

All data were analyzed using SPSS WINDOW 25.0 Program. Descriptive statistics, t-test, analysis

of variance (ANOVA), Pearson's correlation coefficients, and multiple linear regression were performed or determined.

## **Results**

### **1. General characteristics**

The average age of subjects was 23.00 years. The majority 77 (70.0%) of subjects were under the age of 23. By gender, there were 94 (85.5%) females. Those in the 4th grade of college accounted for the most 39 (35.4%). Most of them 69 (62.7%) were not religious. The most common reason for entering nursing department was because they had the right aptitude 65 (59.1%). Seventy-seven 77 (70.0%) subjects were satisfied with their major and 85 (77.3%) were satisfied with their friendship. As for the academic score, 44 (40.0%) scored the most at 3.99-3.50 points [Table 1].

### **2. Degree of caring character, gratitude disposition, and nursing professionalism**

The caring character of subjects in this study had an average score of  $4.34 \pm 0.35$  out of 5. By sub-area, patient respect was the highest at  $4.55 \pm 0.37$  points while commitment was the lowest at  $3.91 \pm 0.60$  points. Gratitude disposition had an average score of  $5.95 \pm 0.80$  on a scale of 7 points. Nursing professionalism had an average score of  $3.95 \pm 0.47$  out of 5. By sub-area, nursing role had the highest score at  $4.25 \pm 0.48$  points, whereas the uniqueness of nursing had the lowest score at  $3.53 \pm 0.76$  points [Table 2].

### **3. Differences in caring character, gratitude disposition, and nursing professionalism according to general characteristics**

Caring character showed a significant difference according to satisfaction with major. As a result of post-hoc analysis, the ‘satisfied’ group had higher score for caring character than the ‘average’ group ( $F=4.30, p=.016$ ). Gratitude disposition showed a significant difference according to the reason for entering nursing department and satisfaction with friendship. As a result of post-hoc analysis, ‘others recommendation’ and ‘employment guarantee’ group had lower gratitude disposition than ‘aptitude’ and ‘others’ groups, but had higher gratitude disposition than ‘entrance exam score’ group ( $F=8.60, p<.001$ ). Satisfaction with friendship was ‘satisfied’ was higher than ‘average’ ( $F=2.79, p=.006$ ). Nursing professionalism showed a significant difference according to satisfaction with friendship. The group of ‘satisfied’ had higher nursing professionalism than the ‘average’ group ( $F=0.91, p=.037$ ) [Table 1].

**4. Correlation between caring character, gratitude disposition, and nursing professionalism**

Caring character showed statistically significant positive correlations with gratitude disposition

( $r=.402, p<.001$ ) and nursing professionalism ( $r=.456, p<.001$ ). Gratitude disposition showed a statistically significant positive correlation with nursing professionalism ( $r=.403, p<.001$ ) [Table 3].

**5. Effect of caring character and gratitude disposition on nursing professionalism**

In the nursing professional regression model, the Durbin-Watson statistic was 2.13, close to 2, indicating that there was no autocorrelation. The tolerance limit was 0.80 to 0.93, which was more than 0.1. The Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) was 1.08 to 1.26, which was less than 10, indicating no problem of multicollinearity. There was no individual with a Cook’s Distance of 1.0 or higher for influence analysis. As a result of analyzing residuals, the normality and equal variance of errors and the linearity of the model were confirmed. Factors significantly affecting nursing professionalism were caring character ( $\beta=.33, p=.001$ ) and gratitude disposition ( $\beta=.26, p=.005$ ). Their total explanatory power was 24.9% [Table 4].

**Table 1. Differences in caring character, gratitude disposition, and nursing professionalism according to general characteristics (N=110)**

Characteristics	Categories	n (%)	Caring character		Gratitude disposition		Nursing professionalism	
			M±SD	t or F (p) Scheffé	M±SD	t or F (p) Scheffé	M±SD	t or F (p) Scheffé
Age (year)	≤23	77 (70.0)	4.34±0.37	-0.45 (.964)	5.82±0.78	-2.64 (.009)	3.97±0.45	0.25 (.803)
	≥24	33 (30.0)	4.35±0.31		6.25±0.77		3.94±0.53	
Gender	Male	16 (14.5)	4.39±0.35	-0.59 (.556)	6.28±0.82	-1.80 (.075)	4.08±0.48	-1.07 (.287)
	Female	94 (85.5)	4.34±0.35		5.90±0.79		3.93±0.47	

**Cont... Table 1. Differences in caring character, gratitude disposition, and nursing professionalism according to general characteristics (N=110)**

Grade	1st	22 (20.0)	4.37±0.44	1.62 (.190)	5.67±0.97	1.13 (.341)	3.88±0.62	0.72 (.545)
	2nd	19 (17.3)	4.24±0.36		6.00±0.68		3.88±0.42	
	3rd	30 (27.3)	4.28±0.26		6.02±0.80		3.96±0.36	
	4th	39 (35.4)	4.42±0.35		6.03±0.75		4.04±0.48	
Religion	Christianity	11 (10.0)	4.31±0.33	0.35 (.792)	6.03±0.60	0.11 (.955)	3.99±0.50	0.16 (.925)
	Catholicism	27 (24.6)	4.35±0.36		5.89±0.89		3.92±0.09	
	Buddhism	3 (2.7)	4.54±0.19		6.06±0.54		4.08±0.07	
	None	69 (62.7)	4.34±0.36		5.96±0.81		3.97±0.06	
Reason for entering nursing department	Change to Aptitude <sup>a</sup>	65 (59.1)	4.38±0.34	2.47 (.060)	6.17±0.60	8.60 ( <i>&lt;.001</i> ) a, e > b, c > d	4.00±0.48	0.61 (.659)
	Others' recommendation <sup>b</sup>	18 (16.4)	4.46±0.43		5.95±0.65		3.98±0.41	
	Employment guarantee <sup>c</sup>	19 (17.3)	4.14±0.28		5.46±1.05		3.81±0.55	
	Entrance exam score <sup>d</sup>	6 (5.4)	4.28±0.22		4.83±0.70		3.91±0.35	
	Others <sup>e</sup>	2 (1.8)	4.47±0.20		6.92±0.12		4.02±0.61	
Satisfaction with major	Satisfied <sup>a</sup>	77 (70.0)	4.41±0.32	4.30 (.016) a > b	6.01±0.72	1.26 (.289)	4.01±0.44	2.40 (.096)
	Average <sup>b</sup>	31 (28.2)	4.20±0.35		5.85±0.86		3.87±0.41	
	Dissatisfied <sup>c</sup>	2 (1.8)	4.21±1.03		5.25±2.47		3.41±1.85	
Satisfaction with friendship	Satisfied <sup>d</sup>	85 (77.3)	4.37±0.34	1.42 (.160)	6.06±0.76	2.79 (.006)	3.98±0.46	0.91 (.037)
	Average <sup>e</sup>	25 (22.7)	4.26±0.39		5.57±0.84		3.88±0.53	
Academic score	≥2.99	2 (1.8)	4.44±0.29	0.50 (.680)	6.92±0.12	1.05 (.374)	3.76±0.39	0.52 (.667)
	3.49-3.00	31 (28.2)	4.40±0.36		5.89±0.93		4.02±0.39	
	3.99-3.50	44 (40.0)	4.33±0.33		5.94±0.84		3.98±0.54	
	4.50-4.00	33 (30.0)	4.31±0.39		5.97±0.59		3.89±0.46	

**Table 2. Degree of Caring Character, Gratitude Disposition, and Nursing Professionalism (N=110)**

Variables	Number of items	Possible score range	Min	Max	M±SD
Caring character	51	1-5	3.49	5.00	4.34±0.35
Patient respect	15	1-5	3.73	5.00	4.55±0.37
Compassion	9	1-5	3.56	5.00	4.39±0.38
Sincerity	8	1-5	2.88	5.00	4.26±0.47
Courage	6	1-5	2.00	5.00	4.15±0.59
Commitment	3	1-5	2.67	5.00	3.91±0.60
Professional attitude	4	1-5	2.75	5.00	4.29±0.54
Professional ethics	3	1-5	3.33	5.00	4.52±0.47
Identity	3	1-5	2.33	5.00	4.10±0.62
Gratitude disposition	6	1-7	3.50	7.00	5.95±0.80
Nursing professionalism	29	1-5	2.10	4.97	3.95±0.47
Professional self-concept	9	1-5	2.22	5.00	4.13±0.53
Social awareness	8	1-5	1.75	5.00	3.64±0.63
Nursing expertise	5	1-5	2.20	5.00	4.19±0.52
Nursing role	4	1-5	2.75	5.00	4.25±0.48
Uniqueness of nursing	3	1-5	1.67	5.00	3.53±0.76

**Table 3. Correlation between Caring Character, Gratitude Disposition, and Nursing Professionalism (N=110)**

Variables	Caring character	Gratitude disposition	Nursing professionalism
	r (p)	r (p)	r (p)
Caring character	1		
Gratitude disposition	.402 (<.001)	1	
Nursing professionalism	.456 (<.001)	.403 (<.001)	1

**Table 4. Effect of Caring Character, Gratitude Disposition on Nursing Professionalism (N=110)**

Dependent Variables	Independent variables	B	SE	β	t	p
Nursing professionalism	(Constant)	1.18	.554		2.13	.036
	Caring character	.45	.125	.33	3.59	.001
	Gratitude disposition	.15	.054	.26	2.85	.005
	Satisfaction with friendship	-.06	.081	-.07	-0.79	.433
		Change to R <sup>2</sup> =.269, Adj. R <sup>2</sup> =.249,				

**Discussion**

In this study, the caring character scored 4.34 out of 5 points. In the study of Cho and Kim [18] score was 4.06, similar to the result of this study. By sub-area, patient respect was the highest while commitment was the lowest. The same results were also found in the study of Cho and Kim [18]. The reason for the highest score for patient respect

might be due to the fact that nursing students respect the values and beliefs of patients and keep good manners and etiquette when providing nursing care [3]. Gratitude disposition scored 5.95 out of 7 points. In the study of Jun [19] had a score of 5.48, Lee and Lee [20] study of score was 5.46, showing a similar score. Gratitude disposition can play an important role in establishing the correct nursing

professional values and promoting happiness among nursing students [21, 22]. Therefore, it is necessary to implement various audit activities and improve the audit disposition through extra-curricular programs. The nursing professionalism of this study had an average score of 3.95 out of 5. The Han [23] study scored 3.74 points. The Lim [24] study scored 3.64 points. The Noh and Kim [25] study scored 3.55 points, showing similar results. Regarding the score for each sub-area, nursing profession scored the highest, while the uniqueness of nursing scored the lowest. In the study of Han [23], the score was similar to results of the present study. The reason for such low perception despite the fact that education is being conducted through major classes needs to be reconfirmed through follow-up research.

As a result of analyzing the difference in caring character according to general characteristics, it was found that the higher the degree of satisfaction with major, the higher the caring character. It is also consistent with the findings of Cho and Kim [26] study. Therefore, it will be necessary to seek institutional and educational strategies that focus on teaching and learning methods and student guidance methods to increase major satisfaction [27, 28]. Gratitude disposition showed a significant difference according to the reason for entering nursing department and satisfaction with friendship. The study of Chung and Ko [11] found that there were significant differences in gratitude disposition according to health status, clinical practice experience, satisfaction with major, and personality orientation. The study of Lee [29] found that there were significant differences in gratitude disposition according to religion, health, college life

satisfaction, and satisfaction with major. As such, various research results have been shown. Since it has been reported that a high level of gratitude disposition is effective in increasing life satisfaction and reducing negative emotional experiences [30], it is a must for professional nurses dealing with patients. Nursing professionalism showed a significant difference according to the satisfaction with friendship. The 'satisfied' group had higher nursing professionalism than the 'average' group. In the study of Park, Jun, and Ban [31], the degree of nursing professionalism was higher in the case of 'good' than the case of 'bad' or 'average' in interpersonal relationships, consistent with results of this study. Therefore can have a positive effect on the formation of nursing professionalism by acting as a protective factor to help students adapt a healthy way in complex human relationships [32] because the better the friendships and interpersonal relationships, the less stress.

As a result of this study, the higher the caring-character and gratitude disposition, the higher the nursing professionalism. Studies on caring personality and nursing professionalism remain insufficient. More research studies are needed to clarify them. A significant positive correlation between gratitude disposition and nursing professionalism has also been reported by Lee and Lee [20], Chung and Ko [11]. A study by Kim, Jin, and Kim [33] has reported that nursing students' gratitude disposition, happiness, and school life adjustment can be significantly increased through a gratitude promotion program. Therefore, when developing various educational programs to improve nursing professionalism of nursing students, gratitude disposition must be considered [20].

As a result of multiple regression analysis in this study, caring character and gratitude disposition were identified as factors significantly affecting nursing professionalism. It is difficult to compare these results with previous reports due to the lack of previous studies. However, results of this study are partially consistent with research results of Jun [21] and Chung and Ko [11]. Therefore, it is necessary to continuously make efforts so that nursing students can form a firm nursing professionalism through the university curriculum and maintain and develop their nursing professional values in the clinical field after graduation [21].

### Conclusion

As a result of this study, it was confirmed that nursing students' caring-character and gratitude disposition had significant effects on nursing professionalism. Therefore, in order to establish and strengthen nursing students' proper nursing professionalism, it is necessary to open courses related to caring character and gratitude disposition with extracurricular programs. In addition, more research studies are needed to verify the effectiveness through application of the program.

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