Proceeding Paper

Lecturing in a Nursing School: Expectations and Constraints between Research and Practice †

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Abstract: Nursing finds the basis for its action in research. The main purpose of research is to discover how to improve nursing care. Nurses are required to provide quality care based on the latest scientific evidence. We expect higher education institutions to develop scientific research; therefore, there seems to be a close relationship between research and teaching. Reconciling these two dimensions is not an easy task. This study demonstrates the close relationship between research and teaching. However, it also highlights some constraints related to the small number of full-time researchers and the difficulty reconciling research and teaching.

Keywords: education; nursing; research; nursing faculty practice

1. Introduction

Nursing research is used to develop disciplinary knowledge and improve professional practice through safety and quality of care. Currently, care contexts are increasingly complex and unpredictable, thus undergoing rapid transformations. Nurses are required to have the knowledge, skills, and abilities to make decisions based on the latest scientific evidence [1]. Nursing is an autonomous subject; hence it is important to develop research in order to support its actions [1]. Higher education institutions are responsible for adequately preparing their students to become competent professionals capable of providing nursing care based on the most up-to-date scientific knowledge. To improve their teaching practice and to meet the needs of care practice, professors have devoted some of their time to research. If, on the one hand, the evidence they produced seems to make sense, since the dissemination of best practices should start with the academy, on the other hand, the knowledge produced does not always seem to be effective in what concerns the necessary transformations in nurses' practices. When we isolate new knowledge, it is not applied [2]. This fact generates debate regarding the relevance and usefulness of the knowledge produced in an academic context, raising some concerns about its real applicability in care practice.

Research projects involving several professors have proliferated in teaching institutions; however, the lack of investment and funding for research projects, despite their expansion in the last two decades [3–6], is still a factor that hinders nursing research. Regardless of the approximation between what we research and what we teach, some concerns about reconciling these two dimensions seem to subsist. Motivated by the theme, the aim of this study is to: (i) identify expectations concerning the use of the knowledge produced in the research; and (ii) recognize the constraints between research and teaching practice.

2. Material and Methods

This paper is an exploratory study, based on a qualitative methodology, with an interpretative character. We chose this type of methodology because the information on the theme under study is poorly structured, explored or known. The goal of the interpretive paradigm is to understand the world through the eyes of the participants, their experiences,

and life processes [7]. It also permits the researcher to explore the meaning of events and the perceptions of the individuals' experiences.

We used the snowball sampling technique to recruit the participants. This is a non-probability sampling method where the individuals we selected to study could invite new participants from their network of friends and acquaintances. This technique facilitated access to the participants. This study respects the ethical principles of the Declaration of Helsinki and has the approval of the Ethics Committee. The initial field of study emerged from the request to participate in the study, and we launched it through social media. We contacted the new participants to avoid disrupting their personal and professional lives. We also requested the participant's willingness and sent out informed consent with an explanatory note.

We chose semi-structured interviews to achieve the defined objectives. These interviews enabled in-depth data and were more facilitative since individuals usually feel more comfortable talking about their thoughts rather than organizing them, and they prefer to express their feelings by writing them. We prepared a script to conduct the interviews and organized them into two thematic blocks and included the characterization of the participants (gender, age, marital status, academic degree, length of service and teaching time). We tested the script on a small sample of four nurses. An expert who gave a favourable opinion carried out the evaluation of the construct. In April 2022, two researchers with experience in performing this technique conducted the interviews by firstly scheduling them via Skype according to the availability and the time chosen by each participant. To ensure the confidentiality of the data, we only considered the presence of the researcher and participant involved. The researchers recorded the interviews on a magnetic device. They did not take notes when conducting the interview. Data reached saturation within a range of 11 interviews. On average, each interview lasted 30 minutes. Subsequently, we transcribed and numbered the interviews in order to identify them [8]. Subsequently, two researchers conducted that analysis separately and, in the end, compared them. As the readings advanced, each researcher developed a preliminary list of coding categories. The objective was to compose a key term indicating the central meaning of the concept of each category. After obtaining each list, the researchers met in order to reach a consensus on the final categorization.

3. Results

Eleven professors from different nursing schools in the northern and central regions of Portugal (public and private) participated in the study. The participants were mostly female (n = 10), divorced (n = 7) or married (n = 4), with a PhD academic degree (n = 11), with an average length of service of 22 years and an average time in teaching of 13 years.

After analysing the information, it was possible to identify the expectations for the using the knowledge produced in the research and to recognize the constraints between research and teaching practice, permitting the identification of these two categories, each containing subcategories (Table 1). Each unit of analysis is represented by the nomenclature "I" of interview followed by a number that corresponds to each of the participants.

Table 1. Categories and subcategories.

Categories	Subcategories	Analysis Units
Expectations	Increasing disciplinary knowledge in nursing	'… for the work in nursing education, the existence of research is fundamental' (I2) '… research is necessary to sustain the transmitted knowledge. It has become essential.' (I6)
	Changing care practices	'We are expected to do research that will serve as evidence and reference for nurses' practices. This should be done "in" the practice and "for" the practice in partnerships work with the health units' (I9)
	Change in the contents of the curricular units	'… the research produced also aims to change pedagogical practices' (I1) '… the results have a double function to support the practices and the curricular units' (I8)
Constraints	At national level	'Research policies were directed towards other emerging fields, such as COVID and its consequences, making research in other fields more difficult.' (I7)
	At local level	'The research professor in nursing is still not recognized; there are professors who also do research' (I4) '… the researcher has not yet become a recognized figure in nursing education institutions' (I5)

4. Discussion

One of the main purposes of nursing research is to discover ways to improve nursing care; hence, it is the object of the study [1]. The participants' speech highlights the fact that they expect higher education institutions to develop this research. 'We are expected to do research that will serve as evidence and reference for nurses' practices. This should be done "in" the practice and "for" the practice in partnerships work with the health units' (I9). From the participants' point of view, research in nursing occupies a central role, thus it is the guiding line of their professional activity.

The reflection on the expectations of the use of knowledge construction demonstrated that the purposes of the research were implicit. In the answers of all interviewees, the will to change, innovate, and intervene is very clear, focusing on the different dimensions, namely: increase in nursing knowledge and change in care practices and the contents of the curricular units. For this to occur, there must be an articulation between knowledge and professional practice. This articulation enables the professor to find other possibilities that sensitize the student to develop a proactive and participatory attitude in the learning process and that, through metacognitive reflection processes, he/she is able to transpose into practice the knowledge that comes from evidence—the grounded knowledge [3].

Some authors advocate that a professor, after lecturing a lesson, should go through a reflection phase. This phase concerns the critical evaluation related to its performance and sustained on the most current scientific evidence or supported by specialized literature. This phase represents the end of a cycle to start a new reflexive movement [2,3]. Bearing this in mind, the authors highlight that professors should build knowledge on the research that he/she produces. This knowledge will then have repercussions on the contents of the curricular units that they teach; hence, a change in care practices occurs and at the same time, an increase in knowledge in what concerns the nursing subject.

Professors also report constraints, essentially on two different levels: national and local. At the national level, they consider that the current pandemic and economic crisis constrain the willingness and investment of people and systems to change, and therefore focus on other emerging issues. At the local level, the limitations relate to the non-recognition by peers of the qualifying role of research, which often leads the professor-researcher to feel isolated or clearly part of a minority [9–11]. The difficulty of reconciling research with the distributed teaching component is also a constraint often mentioned by the professors, 'It is not always easy to reconcile teaching and research activities. The excessive workload and few help in the research field' (I11).

The limitations of this study are the small sample and the non-representation of the entire geographic region of the country.

5. Conclusions

The close relationship between research and teaching practice in nursing education is evident. Although research is the path to change, we raise concerns about its applicability in care practice. However, there are still some constraints related to the minority of full-time nursing researchers and the reconciliation of research with the teaching component.

Institutional Review Board Statement: The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki and approved by the Ethics Committee (58/CE/AM) on 17 March 2022.

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement: Not applicable.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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