

Original Article

Exploring the Association Between Lifelong Learning and Evidence-Based Practice in Nursing

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Abstract. Despite the established relationship between lifelong learning and evidence-based practice (EBP), limited qualitative studies have explored how these concepts interact in shaping nursing practice. The study explores the association between lifelong learning and EBP to understand how continuous professional development contributes to the effective implementation of EBP and optimized patient care standards. An in-depth qualitative single-case study was conducted involving five highly accomplished nurses from five different countries through semi-structured interviews following the American Nurses Association's Guidelines on Ethical Values. Thematic analysis by Braun & Clarke (2006) was employed to iteratively organize, code, and interpret data to extract and understand meaningful patterns or themes. The core finding was the "Culture of Continuous Improvement: The Symbiotic Relationship of Lifelong Learning and Evidence-based Practice," where a supportive organizational culture enables an individual's commitment to lifelong learning and the application of EBP. Foundational themes include the following: (1) The Rudimental Importance of Lifelong Learning for EBP and Patient Outcomes, (2) Personal and Collaborative Strategies for Professional Development, (3) The Critical Role of Organizational Culture and Leadership, and (4) Promoting and Sustaining EBP through Systemic Integration. The study implies that sustained excellence in healthcare results from a reciprocal relationship between a nurse's personal determination for knowledge and a healthcare institution's systemic support. It is recommended that healthcare institutions implement an inclusive framework integrating EBP into daily workflows, deliver strong leadership programs, and provide incentives that foster a lasting culture of continuous improvement in nursing.

Keywords: *Clinical practice; Evidence-based practice; Lifelong learning; Organizational culture; Professional development.*

Nurses today face the critical challenge of keeping their knowledge and skills current to provide high-quality, safe, and effective patient care. The rapid evolution of medical science and technology necessitates that nursing practice be grounded in the most current research and clinical evidence (Lee et al., 2023). Many nurses feel unprepared to critically appraise and apply new research findings, highlighting a deficiency in continuous professional development. This disconnect between evidence and practice is a persistent problem that compromises patient safety and the overall quality of healthcare delivery (Alzahrani & Almarwani, 2026).

The translation of continuous development into clinical action is anchored in Andragogy or Knowles' Adult Learning Theory and Rogers' Diffusion of Innovations Theory (Kaminski, 2015; Taylor & Hamdy, 2013). Knowles'

framework posits that adult learners are self-directed, intrinsically motivated, and rely heavily on prior experience to anchor new knowledge (Taylor & Hamdy, 2013). When applied to nursing, theoretical constructs such as self-directed learning and reflective practice serve as cognitive pathways. This empowers nurse clinicians to independently identify clinical gaps, critically appraise literature, and reflectively modify their daily workflows. However, individual motivation alone does not guarantee clinical translation. Rogers' Diffusion of Innovations Theory explains that the adoption of a new clinical practice depends on how it is communicated through a social system (Mohammadi et al., 2017).

The adoption of EBP remains inconsistent across different countries due to various barriers, including a lack of access to relevant databases, insufficient training, and heavy workloads (World Health Organization, 2024). Most of the barriers to the effective implementation of EBP include insufficiency of resources, scarce access to information, lack of training, understaffing, and lack of support (Pitsillidou et al., 2023). Similarly, nurses often rely on traditional practices rather than integrating new evidence, which can lead to preventable complications and increased healthcare costs. The global landscape of nursing underscores the urgent need for a framework that supports and encourages the continuous professional development necessary for effective EBP (Lee et al., 2024).

Notwithstanding the utilization of Andragogy and Diffusion models, critical limitations arise when executing these frameworks within deeply entrenched clinical environments. Classic adult learning models assume a baseline level of professional autonomy that is frequently stifled by rigid, top-down, hierarchical hospital cultures where independent decision-making by staff nurses is discouraged (Yuk & Yu, 2023). Furthermore, a profound gap exists between theoretical EBP implementation frameworks, which assume stable staffing and readily available digital infrastructure, and the reality of resource-constrained settings characterized by severe understaffing, technical deficits, and exhausting workloads. Traditional diffusion theories often fail to account for these systemic barriers, mistakenly categorizing structural inability to adopt an innovation as individual resistance or "laggard" behavior (Memedovich et al., 2025).

Despite the recognized importance of lifelong learning and evidence-based practice, limited qualitative studies have explored how these concepts interact in shaping nurses' professional practice across diverse healthcare settings. Therefore, this study aimed to explore the symbiotic relationship between lifelong learning and evidence-based practice among experienced nurses and develop a framework that may guide nursing education, organizational support, and improved patient care outcomes.

Methodology

Research Design

The study utilized an in-depth single-case study approach as a qualitative research design. The case is defined as Filipino nurses working abroad and in the Philippines who have extensive lifelong learning activities exploring their relationship in practicing evidence-based practice in Nursing. According to Crowe et al. (2011), multi-faceted explorations of complex issues in their real-life settings are central to this design. It is particularly useful to employ when there is a need to obtain an in-depth appreciation of an issue, event, or phenomenon of interest. Through this method, the study provided a contextual exploration of the relationship between lifelong learning and evidence-based nursing practice. Through an in-depth examination of nurses' experiences, it aimed to develop a framework that guides improvements in nursing and patient care standards. The qualitative case study approach is most appropriate because it allows for an in-depth exploration of the complex relationship between lifelong learning and evidence-based practice within real-life nursing settings. This design is specifically beneficial because there is a need to gain a comprehensive understanding of a phenomenon of interest through the lived experiences of the participants.

Participants and Sampling Technique

The participants in this study were five (5) accomplished nurses who were purposefully sampled. The sufficiency of these five participants was established as data saturation was achieved and assessed during the iterative analysis process. The inclusion criteria in the selection of participants include the following: (a) Filipino Registered Nurses who held an active license released by the Professional Regulation Commission or have active license from any foreign States, (b) highly accomplished Filipino nurses with over fifteen (15) years of extensive experience in either clinical, teaching or community settings, or combined, (c) engaged in multiple or more than twenty (20) professional development activities, such as attending seminars and trainings, (d) doctorate degree holders, and

(e) held key management and administrative positions in the Philippines, Ireland, the United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom, and the United States. The exclusion criteria in the selection include the following: (a) nurses with fewer than fifteen years of clinical, community, or academic experience, (b) non-Filipino nationality without active licensure recognition, and (c) Filipino nurses engaged in fewer than twenty professional development activities.

Research Instruments

A self-made, semi-structured interview guide that underwent rigorous pilot testing with two clinical nurses to refine clarity and flow, alongside expert checking from three nursing research specialists, was the primary tool for collecting the qualitative data. Following McCracken's five-step qualitative interview procedure, the guide's main grand-tour question was based on the study's problem statement. Subsequent questions, developed from a thorough literature review, included "floating prompt questions" to encourage participants to elaborate their answers. A "review of cultural categories" was used to systematically appreciate and analyze the data while maintaining an objective distance from the participants' experiences. The first part of the guide was the introduction, which consisted of greetings, establishing rapport, and providing instructions for participation. The second part was the interview proper, wherein the grand tour question and subsequent related questions were asked. The third part was the closing, wherein the researcher acknowledged the active participation of participants throughout the interview process.

Data Gathering Procedure

Before beginning data collection, a protocol was followed to ensure compliance with research guidelines and protect the participants' rights. After securing informed consent, participants were scheduled for a one-on-one interview using a teleconferencing platform that lasted for forty-five to one hour. Before having the interview proper, the participants were given clear and specific instructions on how to participate. Participants were also informed that the interviews were recorded to ensure the accuracy and detail of the data being shared. After the data analysis, the interview recordings were deleted.

Data Analysis Procedure

The qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke (2006). After each interview, the recordings were transcribed verbatim and reviewed several times to achieve familiarity with the data. Initial codes were then generated inductively from meaningful statements related to lifelong learning, evidence-based practice, organizational culture, leadership, and patient care outcomes. These codes were compared, refined, and grouped into broader categories to identify recurring patterns across participants' accounts. Through an iterative analytic process, the categories were developed into foundational themes and ultimately synthesized into an overarching theme that captured the core meaning of the participants' shared experiences. To ensure trustworthiness, the study maintained an auditable decision trail linking participant quotations, codes, themes, and interpretations. Credibility was further strengthened by grounding all themes in participants' verbatim narratives, thereby minimizing researcher bias and supporting dependability and confirmability.

Ethical Considerations

The investigator adapted the American Nurses Association's Guidelines on Ethical Values to ensure the ethical conduct of the case studies. To protect participants' rights, the researcher first secured informed consent using an adopted "WHO Informed Consent for Qualitative Studies." This was to ensure that the participants were fully aware of the potential benefits and risks in participating in the study. This research was also guided by the ethical principle of autonomy, respecting the participants' free choice whether to participate or not.

Results and Discussion

Core Theme: Culture of Continuous Improvement--- The Symbiotic Relationship of Lifelong Learning and Evidence-based Practice

The overarching theme of this in-depth case study encapsulates the dynamic interplay between the crucial elements: the individual's commitment to lifelong learning and the application of evidence-based practice (EBP) through the enabling support of a positive organizational culture. It revealed that clinical excellence cannot be sustained without this continuous educational loop. As Nurse Ireland emphasized, "*Lifelong learning is crucial for nurses to stay updated with the latest medical research and practices.*" This reality is directly mirrored in active practice,

with Nurse UK noting, *"Working as a clinical nurse educator at a rehabilitation facility, I have seen personally how good evidence-based practice depends on lifelong learning."* This twist demonstrates that lifelong learning serves as the primary mechanism for acquiring knowledge, while EBP provides the clinical outlet to apply it. Nurse Pinoy highlighted the definitive impact of this interaction, explaining, *"Organizational culture and leadership support are the highest influence in adaptation with your learning and EBP."* Without this cultural reinforcement, individual educational pursuits fail to solidify into institutional practice.

Rather than operating as isolated, sequential components, lifelong learning, organizational culture, and leadership interact dynamically to govern the success of EBP adoption. Under Knowles' adult learning lens, individual nurses initiate this process through self-directed inquiry, but their reflective insights remain localized unless activated by the social system (Taylor & Hamdy, 2013). Leadership support functions as the primary catalyst that bridges this gap; when transformational leaders explicitly dedicate time, provide database access, and establish peer mentoring networks, they alter the institutional ecosystem (Kim et al., 2023). This proactive leadership directly reshapes the organizational culture from a rigid compliance-driven environment into an adaptive learning organization. In turn, this supportive culture minimizes the perceived complexity of new research, fostering an environment where continuous education naturally feeds into systemic EBP integration, and successful clinical outcomes reinforce individual motivation to continue learning (Mohammadi et al., 2017).

A supportive organizational culture is a key driver for successful EBP implementation and continuous professional development among nurses. Leadership support and a culture of inquiry are more likely to have nurses who actively engage in EBP and lifelong learning, leading to improved patient outcomes (Melnik et al., 2022). Conversely, a lack of institutional support, such as inadequate time, resources, or mentorship, can create significant barriers to the uptake of new knowledge and the implementation of EBP. This reciprocal relationship underscores that while lifelong learning is a personal responsibility, its impact and sustainability are largely dependent on the systemic support provided by the healthcare organization.

This core theme demonstrates that the intersection of lifelong learning and evidence-based practice is not merely an individual pursuit but a collective endeavor heavily influenced by the healthcare environment. The findings reveal that personal motivation in nursing often masks systemic failures, yet peer-driven micro-cultures can successfully mitigate these structural challenges. Ultimately, clinical excellence is achieved when an organization actively fosters a symbiotic relationship between continuous educational growth and evidence-based clinical application. This synthesis highlights that sustainable improvement requires transitioning from relying on individual resilience to building robust, supportive institutional frameworks.

Foundational Themes

Theme 1. The Rudimental Importance of Lifelong Learning for EBP and Patient Outcomes

This theme highlights the indispensable role of continuous learning in the nursing profession. It underscores the direct connection between a nurse's ongoing education, their ability to effectively apply evidence-based practices, and the subsequent enhancement of patient care. This theme argues that without a foundational commitment to lifelong learning, EBP becomes stagnant, and patient outcomes may fail to meet the highest standards of care.

The participants distinguished a direct connection between active learning and patient safety. Nurse Ireland observed, *"Lifelong learning helps me stay informed about the latest guidelines and innovations,"* explaining that *"By continuously engaging in professional development, nurses can effectively implement evidence-based practices (EBP)."* This approach transforms raw academic data into clinical action at the bedside. Nurse USA supported this perspective, stating, *"By always learning, I make sure our interventions are based on most recent studies."* Ultimately, this professional competence directly improves patient recovery metrics. As Nurse UAE remarked, *"EBP can enhance your knowledge and skills, you are more competent in empowering nurses in the clinical area and they can really help to improve the patient outcome."* Nurse Pinoy summarized the ultimate benefit of this process, noting, *"When nurses use EBP, patients receive care that is scientifically validated, leading to better health results."*

According to Al-Harashsheh et al. (2021), nurses who consistently engage in lifelong learning are better equipped to integrate the latest research findings into their practice, leading to improved patient safety and clinical effectiveness. In a study by Lee et al. (2023), there was a positive correlation between nurses' engagement in continuous professional development and lower rates of medical errors and patient complications which supports that continuous education is the cornerstone of professional nursing practice and is directly responsible for

positive patient outcomes.

Lifelong learning acts as the essential foundation that enables nurses to translate complex research into safe, evidence-based bedside interventions. The study confirms that an ongoing commitment to education directly correlates with reduced medical errors and enhanced clinical effectiveness. By bridging the gap between academic knowledge and practical application, continuous development ensures that patient care remains scientifically validated. Therefore, institutionalizing lifelong learning is not just professional development but a critical strategy for guaranteeing superior patient outcomes.

Theme 2. Personal and Collaborative Strategies for Professional Development

This theme encompasses both the individual initiatives nurses undertake to improve their knowledge and skills, such as attending workshops or conducting independent research, as well as the collaborative efforts within the professional community. It emphasizes the importance of mentorship, peer-to-peer learning, and interdisciplinary collaboration as essential components of a nurse's professional growth, highlighting that while individual drive is important, a significant portion of a nurse's professional development is shaped by interactions and shared learning experiences with colleagues and mentors.

It was discovered that there was a distinct combination between independent learning and peer collaboration. Nurse USA explained how they cultivate a collective learning routine, stating, *"I organize monthly case reviews and journal clubs where our nursing team reviews and discusses recent research articles."* This matches Nurse UK's proactive approach: *"I am an active member of a journal club where I critically appraise and discuss recent research articles with my peers."* To complement these group activities, participants actively pursue structured personal education. Nurse USA shared, *"I regularly enroll in online courses (via Lippincott Solution) focused on research methodologies, statistical analysis, and EBP implementation,"* while also making sure to *"attend annual nursing conferences and EBP-focused workshops."* Furthermore, these strategies rely heavily on professional mentorship networks. As Nurse UK mentioned, *"I both mentor newer nurses and seek mentorship from more experienced colleagues."* Nurse Pinoy added that *"Engaging with experienced colleagues and mentors provides valuable insights and practical advice on implementing EBP."*

According to Ominyi & Alabi (2026), peer collaboration and mentorship programs significantly enhance nurses' confidence and competence in implementing EBP. Furthermore, nurses who participate in journal clubs or regular interdisciplinary team meetings report a greater ability to translate research into practice, which suggests that while individual learning is foundational, the social and collaborative aspects of professional development are critical for fostering a culture of EBP and continuous improvement (Davidson, 2025).

Professional development in nursing thrives when individual commitment is balanced with active engagement in collaborative communities like journal clubs and mentorship networks. While independent study builds personal knowledge, social interaction with peers is essential for translating that information into actual clinical practice. These collaborative strategies effectively increase nurse confidence and provide the necessary support to bridge the research-to-practice gap. Thus, fostering a community-oriented learning environment is a key driver for professional growth and institutional competence.

Theme 3. The Critical Role of Organizational Culture and Leadership

This theme posits that individual and collaborative efforts are most effective when supported by a robust and positive organizational culture. It includes factors such as leadership support, the allocation of necessary resources, and the creation of an environment that values inquiry and change. This theme suggests that without strong leadership and a supportive organizational context, the adoption and sustainability of EBP are severely hindered, regardless of a nurse's personal motivation.

The theme underscores that institutional backing is vital for transforming individual knowledge into practice. Nurse Ireland noted, *"A hospital that prioritizes professional development by offering regular training sessions and access to online courses fosters an environment where lifelong learning is the norm."* This prioritization requires explicit corporate backing, as Nurse UK affirmed, *"Our leadership gives learning top priority and funds and time for professional development help to support this."* This support is demonstrated through tangible resources, with Nurse UK adding, *"We get four paid education days every year, for example, which I have used to go to EBP conferences and seminars."* Beyond providing educational leave, institutions must give staff immediate access to research tools. Nurse USA shared, *"Our hospital made investments in a large online library and database subscriptions (e.g., Lippincott Solutions, UpToDate*

etc.) so that staff members may easily access current research." Nurse Pinoy similarly relied on these resources, stating, "I also make extensive use of online databases like PubMed and CINAHL to search for the latest studies and guidelines."

A 2023 systematic review by Kim et al. (2023) found that strong, transformational leadership and a supportive work environment were among the most frequently cited facilitators of EBP adoption among nurses. According to the American Nurses Association (2022), healthcare institutions with leaders who champion EBP and provide protected time for learning and research saw a significant increase in EBP implementation rates and a corresponding decrease in adverse patient events which confirms that a supportive organizational culture and proactive leadership are essential for creating the conditions under which lifelong learning and EBP can flourish.

Individual nurses cannot sustain evidence-based practice in isolation; it requires a supportive organizational culture and proactive leadership to provide the necessary resources and protected time. Institutional commitment, demonstrated through access to research databases and professional development funding, is the critical catalyst for enabling clinical staff to apply new knowledge. When leaders champion these initiatives, they transform the hospital environment from a rigid system into an adaptive learning organization. Therefore, leadership backing is a fundamental prerequisite for successfully integrating evidence-based practice into daily healthcare routines.

Theme 4. Promoting and Sustaining EBP Through Systemic Integration

This theme focuses on the actionable recommendations and policies that transform the culture of continuous improvement from an abstract concept into a living reality. It includes strategies such as creating a culture of education, integrating EBP into daily practice workflows, and providing motivation and recognition for nurses who engage in these behaviors.

The participants recommended setting up clear, structured pathways to support long-term EBP implementation. Nurse Ireland noted, "First, creating a culture that values continuous education is essential." To achieve this, leaders must build open platforms for sharing information, a strategy Nurse UK highlighted: "Establish an easily available internal platform where employees may distribute research results, effective EBP implementations, and learning materials." Nurse Pinoy also suggested that "Leaders should actively promote EBP by providing the necessary resources and creating an environment where questioning and innovation are encouraged." However, before implementing any external findings, nurses must assess how well they fit the local environment. As Nurse UAE cautioned, "I would always take note the applicability of each article if they are suited to my current institution." Finally, keeping staff motivated requires formal incentive programs. Nurse USA advised that "Recognizing and rewarding staff who excel in implementing EBP can also motivate others," which matches Nurse UK's practical approach: "Establish a recognition system to honor employees who effectively carry out EBP programs."

According to Titler (2008), organizations that integrate EBP into performance reviews, clinical guidelines, and daily workflows are more successful at sustaining its use over time. In addition, recognizing and rewarding nurses for their EBP projects and continuous learning initiatives significantly increases their motivation and commitment to these practices, which highlights that for EBP to be a lasting part of a healthcare system, it must be supported by formal structures and incentives that make it a valued and integral part of professional practice (Alotaibi, 2026).

Lasting evidence-based practice is achieved by formally integrating continuous learning and clinical inquiry into the daily fabric of institutional workflows. Success depends on establishing clear, structured pathways, such as internal information-sharing platforms and formalized recognition systems that reward clinical innovation. Beyond structural changes, nurses must be empowered to evaluate the local applicability of external evidence to ensure meaningful implementation. Thus, institutionalizing these practices with concrete incentives transforms a culture of improvement into a sustainable, long-term standard.

The Symbiosis of Lifelong Learning and Evidence-Based Practice: A Framework for Optimizing Patient Care Standards in Nursing

This innovative framework illustrates the dynamic interplay between lifelong learning and EBP through organizational support that strengthens the cooperative relationship as foundational in optimizing patient care standards in nursing. A nurse's personal commitment to ongoing education is the fundamental catalyst for the effective application of EBP, which in turn can lead to optimizing patient care standards. The framework reflects that these individual and collective efforts can only be sustained when they are nurtured within a robust and positive organizational culture that is championed by strong leadership. Ultimately, the framework emphasizes

that long-term success of a healthcare institution in delivering high-quality patient care is fundamentally dependent on both the individual's drive for knowledge and the systemic support provided by their organization.

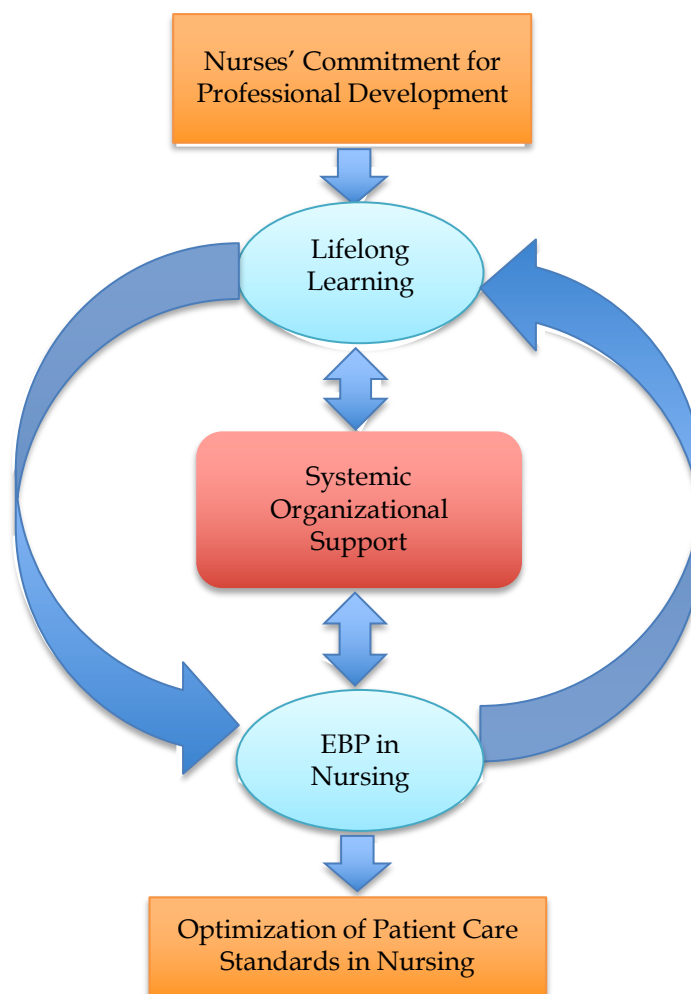


Figure 1. *The Symbiosis of Lifelong Learning and EBP: A Framework for Optimizing Patient Care Standards in Nursing*

At the very core of this model lies a personal commitment to continuous education, which serves as the primary engine for professional development. When nurses actively pursue lifelong learning, they equip themselves with the critical thinking skills necessary to evaluate and integrate contemporary clinical research. This individual drive directly fuels the systematic implementation of EBP, ensuring that clinical interventions are grounded in the best available scientific data. As a result, the seamless translation of newly acquired knowledge into clinical settings can directly elevate the standards of professional nursing care. Conversely, the practical challenges encountered during patient care stimulate a renewed desire for learning, thereby creating a self-sustaining cycle of intellectual curiosity. Consequently, this symbiotic relationship positions individual accountability as an indispensable pillar for achieving clinical excellence.

However, individual dedication alone is insufficient without systemic organizational support acting as the structural scaffold for these educational pursuits. Healthcare institutions must actively cultivate an environment that provides the necessary resources, time, and financial support for ongoing professional development. Strong leadership plays a pivotal role by championing policies that reward clinical inquiry and celebrate evidence-based milestones. Furthermore, organizations must implement robust collaborative strategies, such as structured mentorship programs, to facilitate the seamless transfer of knowledge between expert and novice clinicians. Interdisciplinary teamwork further enriches this environment by breaking down professional silos and fostering

a holistic approach to patient care. When systemic organizational support is firmly established, it transforms individual learning initiatives into a collective, institutional standard of practice.

Therefore, sustained excellence is achieved through a reciprocal relationship in which each element reinforces the other, forming a firm cycle of improvement. The framework clearly demonstrates that individual frontline nurses and administrative leaders share an equal responsibility in cultivating this progressive ecosystem. When the organization invests heavily in its workforce, nurses are highly motivated to advance their clinical competencies and refine their EBP methodologies. This mutual reinforcement ensures that the healthcare institution remains agile, adaptive, and highly responsive to evolving medical breakthroughs. Ultimately, the institutionalization of this framework shifts the healthcare paradigm from reactive problem-solving to a proactive culture of continuous improvement. By securing both the internal drive of the clinician and the external backing of the system, the delivery of high-quality patient care becomes a consistent, sustainable standard.

Conclusion

The findings of this in-depth single-case study implied the dynamic interplay between lifelong learning and evidence-based practice (EBP) through organizational support. It strengthens the symbiotic relationship as the foundation for a culture of continuous improvement. A nurse's personal commitment to ongoing education is the fundamental catalyst for the effective application of EBP, which in turn can lead to optimized patient care standards. This personal dedication is not an isolated endeavor but is significantly reinforced by collaborative strategies, such as mentorship and interdisciplinary teamwork, which provide vital opportunities for shared knowledge and professional growth. The research highlights that these individual and collective efforts can only be sustained when they are nurtured within a robust and positive organizational culture that is championed by strong leadership. This study posits that the long-term success of a healthcare institution in delivering high-quality patient care depends on both individuals' drive for knowledge and the systemic support provided by their organization. Therefore, sustained excellence is achieved through a reciprocal relationship in which each element reinforces the other, forming a firm cycle of improvement. Ultimately, the proposed framework provides a practical guide for healthcare institutions and nursing educators in designing policies and professional development initiatives that foster evidence-based practice through continuous learning. Future studies may validate and apply this framework across diverse healthcare settings and larger populations to establish its broader applicability.

Contributions of Authors

Author: conceptualization, instrument validation & pilot testing, data gathering, data analysis, final reporting.

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Conflict of Interests

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