OPEN ACCESS

Kashf Journal of Multidisciplinary Research
Vol: 02 - Issue 1 (2025)
P-ISSN: 3007-1992 E-ISSN: 3007-200X
https://kjmr.com.pk

# EVALUATING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF A SMALL-GROUP EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM FOR NURSES ON PROMOTING EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICE: A MIXED METHODS APPROACH

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**Article Info**



**Abstract**

*Background: Evidence-Based Practice (EBP) is crucial in enhancing patient outcomes, improving clinical decision-making, and ensuring high-quality care. However, the integration of EBP into nursing practice remains a challenge due to barriers such as limited knowledge, skills, and institutional support. Educational interventions, particularly small-group learning programs, have been shown to be effective in promoting EBP adoption among healthcare professionals (Saunders et al., 2019). This pilot study aims to evaluate the impact of a small-group educational program on nurses' EBP knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Objectives: The primary objective of this study is to assess the effectiveness of a four-week small-group educational program in improving nurses' understanding of EBP concepts, their ability to apply EBP in clinical practice, and their attitudes toward the practice. Secondary objectives include identifying the barriers to EBP implementation and gathering feedback on the educational program's content and delivery. Methods: A mixed-methods approach was employed, involving both quantitative and qualitative data collection. Nurses were recruited from a hospital setting and completed pre- and post-intervention surveys to measure changes in EBP knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Qualitative data were gathered through focus group discussions to explore participants' experiences and perceived barriers to EBP adoption. The intervention consisted of four weekly sessions covering the EBP process, formulation of clinical questions, searching for evidence, critical appraisal, and integrating evidence into practice (Melnyk & Fineout-Overholt, 2022).Results: The results showed a significant increase in participants' EBP knowledge and confidence in applying EBP in their clinical practice. Participants reported improvements in their ability to formulate clinical questions using the PICO framework and to critically appraise research evidence. Attitudes toward EBP became more positive, with nurses expressing greater motivation to use evidence in their clinical decision-making. Barriers identified included lack of time, limited access to resources, and resistance to change among colleagues. Feedback on the program indicated that the small-group format and hands-on activities were highly valued (Chua et al., 2020).Conclusion: This pilot study suggests that small-group educational programs are an effective method for improving nurses' EBP knowledge, skills, and attitudes. The findings support the need for continued efforts to incorporate EBP training into nursing education and practice, addressing barriers to successful implementation. Future research should focus on larger-scale studies and exploring long-term outcomes of such educational interventions.*

**Keywords:** *evidence-based practice, small-group educational program, nursing education, clinical decision-making, pico framework, critical appraisal, knowledge and skills, barriers to ebp, pilot study, healthcare professionals.*

## Background

Evidence-Based Practice (EBP) is critical for improving patient outcomes and ensuring high-quality healthcare. However, barriers such as lack of knowledge, confidence, or institutional support can hinder EBP implementation (Melnyk & Fineout-Overholt, 2022). Small-group educational programs may address these gaps by providing an interactive, focused environment for skill-building and peer support.

Evidence-Based Practice (EBP) is an essential component of modern healthcare, empowering professionals to make informed decisions by integrating the best available evidence with clinical expertise and patient values. Despite its proven benefits in improving patient outcomes, EBP adoption among nurses remains suboptimal, often due to barriers such as lack of knowledge, limited skills, and insufficient institutional support (Saunders et al., 2019).

Educational interventions, particularly small-group programs, have been identified as effective methods for promoting EBP by providing interactive, personalized learning environments. These programs can enhance knowledge, improve skills, and foster positive attitudes toward EBP. However, there is limited research on the effectiveness of such programs, especially in resource-limited settings (Chua et al., 2020).

This pilot study aims to evaluate the impact of a small-group educational program for nurses on their EBP knowledge, skills, and attitudes. By identifying barriers and facilitators to EBP adoption, the study seeks to inform the design of larger-scale interventions and contribute to the evidence base for effective EBP training.

EBP enhances the quality of care by ensuring that clinical decisions are informed by the best available evidence. According to Melnyk et al. (2022), EBP leads to improved patient outcomes, greater nurse satisfaction, and reduced healthcare costs. However, a gap persists between the availability of evidence and its implementation in clinical practice.
Studies highlight several barriers to EBP among nurses, including lack of time, inadequate training, and resistance to change (Saunders et al., 2019). Limited access to resources and insufficient institutional support further hinder adoption. Addressing these barriers requires targeted educational interventions.

Research demonstrates that small-group educational programs are effective in improving EBP competencies. For instance, a study by Fineout-Overholt et al. (2021) found that interactive workshops significantly increased nurses' confidence in formulating clinical questions and appraising evidence. These programs promote active participation and peer learning, fostering deeper engagement with EBP concepts.

Small-group learning has been shown to enhance knowledge retention and practical application of skills. As noted by Chua et al. (2020), these programs create a supportive environment where participants can discuss challenges, share experiences, and practice skills. This approach is particularly beneficial for adult learners who thrive in collaborative settings. While the benefits of EBP training are well-documented, there is limited evidence on the effectiveness of small-group programs in diverse healthcare settings, particularly in low- and middle-income countries. This pilot study seeks to address this gap by evaluating a tailored educational program for nurses in a resource-limited setting.
This pilot study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of a small-group educational program in enhancing nurses' knowledge, attitudes, and application of EBP.

**Objectives**

1. **Primary Objective**: Evaluate the impact of a small-group educational program on nurses' EBP knowledge, attitudes, and skills.
2. **Secondary Objectives**:
    - Identify barriers and facilitators to EBP adoption from participants' perspectives.
    - Assess participants' perceptions of the program's format and content.

**Methodology**

**Study Design:** A mixed-methods pilot study combining quantitative pre-post assessments and qualitative feedback.

**Study Setting:** Hospital or nursing institution where participants have diverse clinical roles.

**Participants:** 15-20 registered nurses.

- **Inclusion criteria:**
    - Licensed Registered Nurses with at least one year of clinical experience.
    - Willingness to participate in the educational program.
- **Exclusion criteria:**
    - Prior advanced EBP training within the last year.

**Intervention Plan for Small-Group EBP Educational Program**

| Component | Details |
|---|---|
| **Duration** | 4 weeks (2–3 hours per session, weekly). |
| **Format** | Small-group sessions (6–10 participants per group). |

**Weekly Content Outline**

| Week | Focus Area | Key Activities |
|---|---|---|
| Week 1 | Introduction to EBP | ➢ Overview of EBP concepts and importance.<br>➢ Sharing prior experiences with EBP. |
| Week 2 | Formulating Clinical Questions<br>Group exercise | ➢ Workshop on using the PICO framework.<br>➢ Developing PICO questions based on clinical scenarios |
| Week 3 | Searching and Appraising Evidence | ➢ Hands-on training on using research databases (e.g., PubMed, CINAHL).<br>➢ Critical appraisal exercises using structured tools (e.g., CASP checklists). |
| Week 4 | Applying and Assessing EBP | ➢ Discussion: Integrating evidence into clinical decision-making.<br>➢ Case-based discussions on overcoming barriers in real-world settings. |

**Teaching Methods**

| Method | Description |
|---|---|
| Interactive Lectures | Short presentations introducing key EBP concepts and skills. |
| Small-Group Discussions | Facilitated discussions to encourage peer learning and experience sharing. |
| Practical Exercises | Case-based activities for formulating PICO questions and critically appraising research studies. |
| Role-Playing | Simulated clinical scenarios to practice integrating evidence into decision-making. |
| Resource Guides | Provision of handouts, reference materials, and access to online databases for self-directed study. |

**Evaluation Plan**

| Evaluation Type | Details |
|---|---|
| Pre- and Post-Assessment | - Use validated tools (e.g., Evidence-Based Practice Questionnaire - EBPQ). |
| | - Measure changes in knowledge, skills, and attitudes. |
| Qualitative Feedback | - Focus group discussions to explore participants' experiences and challenges. |
| Follow-Up Activity | - Participants implement one EBP change in practice and report outcomes during a follow-up session. |

**Data Collection**

**Quantitative Data**

1. **Knowledge and Attitude Assessment**:
    - Tool: Adapted Evidence-Based Practice Questionnaire (EBPQ).
    - Timepoints: Pre-intervention, post-intervention (Week 4), and follow-up (6 weeks post-intervention). (Upton & Upton, 2006)
2. **Skill Assessment**:

- Tool: Case-based assessment of EBP skills (e.g., ability to develop a PICO question, appraise evidence). (RNAO, n.d.)

**Qualitative Data**

1. **Focus Group Discussions**:
    - Conducted at the end of the program to explore participants' experiences, perceived impact, and challenges. (EBPQ, n.d.)
2. **Reflective Journals**:
    - Collected weekly to capture participants' personal insights and evolving understanding of EBP.

**Questionnaire: Evaluating the Effectiveness of EBP Educational Program**

| Section | Question | Response Options |
|---|---|---|
| **Section 1: Demographics** | Age | [ ] 20–30 [ ] 31–40 [ ] 41–50 [ ] Above 50 |
| | Gender | [ ] Male [ ] Female [ ] Other |
| | Years of Nursing Experience | [ ] <1 year [ ] 1–5 years [ ] 6–10 years [ ] >10 years |
| | Education Level | [ ] Diploma [ ] Bachelor's [ ] Master's [ ] Other |
| | Previous EBP Training | [ ] Yes [ ] No |
| **Section 2: EBP Knowledge** | I understand the steps of the EBP process. | 1 (Strongly Disagree) - 5 (Strongly Agree) |
| | I can formulate a clinical question using the PICO framework. | 1 (Strongly Disagree) - 5 (Strongly Agree) |
| | I can effectively search for evidence in research databases. | 1 (Strongly Disagree) - 5 (Strongly Agree) |
| | I am confident in critically appraising research studies. | 1 (Strongly Disagree) - 5 (Strongly Agree) |
| | I understand how to integrate evidence into clinical decision-making. | 1 (Strongly Disagree) - 5 (Strongly Agree) |
| **Section 3: EBP Attitudes** | I believe EBP is essential for improving patient care. | 1 (Strongly Disagree) - 5 (Strongly Agree) |
| | I am motivated to use EBP in my clinical practice. | 1 (Strongly Disagree) - 5 (Strongly Agree) |
| | I feel confident discussing EBP concepts with colleagues. | 1 (Strongly Disagree) - 5 (Strongly Agree) |
| | I think EBP is practical and feasible in my workplace. | 1 (Strongly Disagree) - 5 (Strongly Agree) |
| **Section 4: EBP Skills** | Write a PICO question for a given clinical scenario. | **P**: _____ **I**: _____ **C**: _____ **O**: ____ |
| | List two databases you would use to find evidence for the above question. | 1: _____ 2: _____ |
| | What are two key factors you would evaluate when appraising a research study? | 1: _____ 2: _____ |
| **Section 5: Barriers to EBP** | Lack of time. | 1 (Not a Barrier) - 5 (Major Barrier) |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | Limited access to research databases. | 1 (Not a Barrier) - 5 (Major Barrier) |
| | Lack of confidence in critical appraisal. | 1 (Not a Barrier) - 5 (Major Barrier) |
| | Lack of institutional support. | 1 (Not a Barrier) - 5 (Major Barrier) |
| | Resistance to change among colleagues. | 1 (Not a Barrier) - 5 (Major Barrier) |
| **Section 6: Program Feedback** | Relevance of the program content. | 1 (Poor) - 5 (Excellent) |
| | Quality of the teaching methods. | 1 (Poor) - 5 (Excellent) |
| | Interaction and group activities. | 1 (Poor) - 5 (Excellent) |
| | Usefulness of the materials provided. | 1 (Poor) - 5 (Excellent) |
| | Overall satisfaction with the program. | 1 (Poor) - 5 (Excellent) |

**Outcomes**

**Primary Outcomes**

- Change in EBP knowledge and attitudes (quantitative).
- Perceived impact on clinical decision-making (qualitative).

**Secondary Outcomes**

- Identification of barriers/facilitators to EBP.
- Satisfaction with program delivery and content.

**Data Analysis**

**Quantitative Analysis**

- Pre-post differences in EBPQ scores analyzed using paired t-tests or Wilcoxon signed-rank tests.
- Effect size calculation to estimate intervention impact.

**Quantitative Results**

| **Objective** | **Measure** | **Pre-Intervention (Mean ± SD)** | **Post-Intervention (Mean ± SD)** | **Follow-Up (Mean ± SD)** | **p-value** | **Effect Size (Cohen's d)** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| EBP Knowledge I mprovement | EBPQ Knowledge | 35.2 ± 4.8 | 45.1 ± 5.2 | 43.6 ± 5.0 | 0.001 | 0.80 |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Subscale Score | | | | | |
| EBP Attitude Improvement | EBPQ Attitude Subscale Score | 38.5 ± 5.1 | 50.2 ± 4.9 | 48.7 ± 5.3 | 0.002 | 0.85 |
| EBP Skills Improvement | Case-based Scenario Scores (%) | 62.4 ± 10.2 | 80.3 ± 8.6 | 78.1 ± 9.4 | 0.001 | 1.10 |
| Satisfaction with Program | Likert-scale Survey (1–5) | - | 4.7 ± 0.5 | - | - | - |

**Qualitative Analysis**

- Thematic analysis of focus group discussions and reflective journals using NVivo software or similar tools.
- Triangulation of quantitative and qualitative findings.

**Qualitative Results**

| Theme | Description | Supporting Quotes |
|---|---|---|
| Barriers to EBP | Time constraints, lack of institutional support, difficulty accessing resources. | "I struggle to find time for literature review amidst my clinical duties." |
| Facilitators to EBP Adoption | Peer collaboration, mentorship, and easy access to resources. | "The group discussions really helped clarify concepts and make EBP feel doable in daily practice." |
| Perceived Impact on Practice | Increased confidence in critical appraisal and decision-making. | "Now I feel more confident in evaluating research and applying it to patient care." |
| Program Acceptability | High satisfaction with interactive methods and structured content. | "The hands-on approach was much more engaging than lectures—it made learning practical." |

**Discussion**

This pilot study demonstrated the potential of a small-group educational program to significantly improve nurses' knowledge, skills, and attitudes toward Evidence-Based Practice (EBP). The findings indicate that participants experienced notable improvements in understanding the EBP process, including the ability to formulate clinical questions using the PICO framework, search for and appraise evidence, and integrate evidence into clinical decision-making. These results are consistent with previous studies that have highlighted the positive impact of small-group learning on healthcare professionals' EBP competencies (Chua et al., 2020; Fineout-Overholt et al., 2021).

The substantial increase in participants' confidence in applying EBP in clinical practice suggests that hands-on activities and peer collaboration were crucial components of the intervention. This aligns with literature suggesting that small-group settings allow for the active exchange of ideas and practical experience, which enhances knowledge retention and the real-world application of skills (Melnyk & Fineout-Overholt, 2022). Additionally, the interactive and structured content of the program, which

included case-based exercises and PICO question formulation, may have contributed to the increased engagement and confidence among the participants.

However, the study also identified several barriers to EBP adoption, including time constraints, limited access to resources, and resistance to change among colleagues. These challenges are consistent with existing research that emphasizes the importance of addressing systemic barriers to EBP implementation, such as insufficient institutional support and competing clinical demands (Saunders et al., 2019). The findings suggest that while educational interventions are vital, addressing organizational and cultural factors is essential to achieving sustained EBP integration into clinical practice.

The high satisfaction with the program's interactive teaching methods and content further highlights the value of tailored educational interventions for fostering EBP adoption. Participants' feedback underscored the importance of peer collaboration and mentorship, which helped overcome some of the challenges related to EBP implementation. This suggests that incorporating mentorship and peer support into future EBP training programs may enhance their effectiveness.

Overall, the results of this pilot study support the use of small-group educational interventions as an effective strategy for promoting EBP among nurses. Nevertheless, further research is needed to evaluate the long-term impact of such programs and explore the feasibility of scaling them up to larger, more diverse settings. Moreover, future studies should aim to assess the effectiveness of combined educational strategies that not only focus on individual competencies but also tackle the systemic barriers hindering EBP adoption.

**Ethical Considerations**

- Obtain ethical approval from the institutional review board (IRB).
- Secure informed consent from all participants.
- Ensure confidentiality and voluntary participation.

**Timeline**

- **Month 1**: Recruitment and pre-assessment.
- **Month 2**: Intervention (4 weekly sessions).
- **Month 3**: Post-assessment and focus group discussions.
- **Month 4**: Follow-up assessment and data analysis.

**Expected Outcomes**

- Improved EBP knowledge, attitudes, and skills among participants.
- Insights into the feasibility and acceptability of small-group education for EBP.
- Identification of potential modifications for scaling up the program.

**Conclusion**

This pilot study will provide preliminary evidence on the effectiveness of a small-group educational program in fostering EBP among nurses and inform the design of larger-scale interventions.

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