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## Unveiling Perceptions: A Qualitative Exploration of Nursing Research Expectations Among Incoming Third-Year Students

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### Abstract

**Aim:** This study explored the perceptions and expectations of incoming third-year nursing students regarding nursing research prior to their formal course exposure, focusing on their initial understanding, emotional responses, and perceived relevance.

**Methods:** A qualitative descriptive design was employed, involving reflective writings from 45 purposively selected incoming third-year Bachelor of Science in Nursing students enrolled in a private university in Bulacan, Philippines, during Academic Year 2025–2026. Data were collected through a validated semi-structured reflective writing guide and analyzed using qualitative content analysis guided by Graneheim and Lundman's framework.

**Results:** Analysis yielded seven interrelated themes: (1) building research competence through skill development and application; (2) navigating emotional responses—ranging from curiosity and excitement to anxiety and self-doubt; (3) research as a catalyst for evidence-based nursing and patient care improvement; (4) innovation and technological integration in nursing; (5) influence of educators, mentors, and learning environments; (6) challenges in research—technical and resource-related; and (7) research as a pathway for lifelong learning and career growth. Students expressed strong interest in linking research skills to clinical practice, acknowledged its role in enhancing patient outcomes, and recognized the value of innovation, while also identifying gaps in statistical, writing, and presentation skills.

**Conclusion:** Incoming third-year nursing students view nursing research as both a professional necessity and a personal opportunity for growth, while recognizing anticipated challenges. These insights underscore the need for research curricula that integrate early skill-building, emotional readiness support, mentorship, and practical application to sustain engagement and promote evidence-based practice.

**Keywords:** *Nursing research, student perceptions, student expectations, evidence-based practice, qualitative descriptive study, nursing education*

### INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the role of research in undergraduate nursing education has gained unprecedented attention, with educational institutions worldwide recognizing the need to nurture research-literate nurses capable of engaging in evidence-based practice (EBP) early in their careers. Nursing research is no longer viewed as an isolated academic requirement but as a foundational pillar of professional nursing competence. Curricular reforms have emphasized the integration of research concepts as early as the second or third year of study, aiming to develop both research skills and a positive disposition toward inquiry (Durmuş et al., 2025). These efforts reflect a broader



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shift in nursing education—one that prioritizes not only knowledge and skill acquisition but also the cultivation of interest, confidence, and engagement in research endeavors.

Parallel to this global movement is an emerging focus on students' perceptions and expectations of research before formal instruction begins. Contemporary literature highlights that how students feel about research before they even open a textbook can significantly influence their motivation, engagement, and learning outcomes throughout the course. Studies indicate that early misconceptions—such as the belief that research is irrelevant to clinical practice or overly challenging—may hinder active participation and foster enduring negative attitudes (Karimi Mirzanezam et al., 2024). Conversely, when students begin with even a modest appreciation of research's role in improving patient care, they tend to demonstrate greater openness and sustained interest. These trends underscore the importance of examining nursing students' initial perspectives to better design educational approaches that foster not just competence but also research enthusiasm and professional curiosity from the outset.

Despite the increasing body of research investigating nursing students' perceptions of clinical environments, simulation-based learning, and active learning strategies during or after instruction (e.g., Koldestam et al., 2025; Al Malki et al., 2023), scholarship remains surprisingly limited regarding students' perceptions and expectations of nursing research prior to formal course engagement. Most of the existing literature centers on experiences during instruction or post-course reflections, rather than the pre-instructional mindset that students bring into their first research class. While recent studies explore perceptions of active learning (Kalu et al., 2023) and flipped classrooms (Dongmei Zhang et al., 2025), the foundational phase—when students hold beliefs or emotions about research before instruction begins—remains largely unexamined. This represents a critical omission because initial perceptions can profoundly influence motivation, engagement, and learning trajectories in rigorous subjects such as nursing research.

Moreover, within the Philippine context, research has yet to fully investigate incoming third-year nursing students' pre-course perceptions of research learning, particularly at private universities in Bulacan offering BS Nursing programs. While there is literature on clinical learning environments (Zhang et al., 2022) and instructional experiences in simulation and pedagogy (Al Malki et al., 2023; Kalu et al., 2023), the pre-instructional attitudes toward nursing research at this pivotal transitional point remain unexplored. Because the third year often marks the introduction of formal research coursework amidst clinical demands and theoretical complexity, understanding students' initial perceptions at this juncture is essential. This study addresses that gap by examining the research expectations, emotional dispositions, and conceptual understandings of students before they begin their Nursing Research course, thus providing insights that can inform more responsive and effective pedagogical design.

## Statement of the Problem

Nursing research is a critical component of professional formation, equipping future nurses with the skills to engage in evidence-based practice and contribute to the advancement of healthcare. However, students often enter the research course with limited preparation, preconceived notions, and emotional responses that may hinder or enhance their engagement. For many, this transition from theoretical nursing concepts to research inquiry is accompanied by anxiety, self-doubt, or uncertainty about its relevance to clinical practice. While several studies have examined the outcomes of nursing research courses, limited attention has been given to the perceptions and expectations of students before they are formally introduced to research as a subject. Understanding these initial views is essential in shaping research pedagogy, designing responsive curricula, and providing mentorship that fosters early engagement. In the Philippine context, where nursing education continues to adapt to global standards and technological advancements, there is an urgent need to examine how incoming third-year students perceive and anticipate their research journey. This study seeks to address this gap by exploring the perceptions and expectations of nursing students toward research prior to formal academic exposure.

## Research Objectives

### General Objective

- To explore and describe the perceptions and expectations of incoming third-year nursing students toward nursing research prior to their formal academic engagement with the subject.

### Specific Objectives

- To identify students' initial understanding of nursing research as they enter the course.



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2. To examine students' emotional responses toward nursing research, including curiosity, excitement, anxiety, and self-doubt.
3. To determine students' perceived relevance of nursing research to clinical practice, professional growth, and lifelong learning.
4. To describe the challenges and skill gaps students anticipate encountering in research, such as statistical knowledge, writing, and presentation.
5. To explore the influence of mentors, educators, and learning environments on students' perceptions and expectations of research.

## Research Questions

1. What are the initial perceptions and understanding of incoming third-year nursing students toward nursing research?
2. How do incoming third-year nursing students describe their emotional responses toward nursing research?
3. How do students perceive the relevance of nursing research to evidence-based practice, patient care, and career development?
4. What challenges and skill gaps do students anticipate in relation to nursing research?
5. How do educators, mentors, and learning environments influence students' perceptions and expectations of nursing research?

## METHODS

### Research Design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design, which is appropriate for understanding the natural language, experiences, and perceptions of participants without imposing a pre-existing theoretical framework. This approach is particularly suited for nursing education research when the goal is to explore perceptions in a clear, minimally interpretive manner (Bradshaw et al., 2021). Similar descriptive qualitative methods have been used in other educational studies to capture authentic perspectives of students and teachers (Abenojar et al., 2025; Bontuyan, 2025). The design allowed the researcher to gain in-depth insights into how incoming third-year nursing students perceive nursing research before formal instruction.

Reflective writing was used as the primary data collection method, as it encourages self-expression and metacognitive engagement with the topic. This aligns well with the goals of qualitative descriptive studies, which aim to provide rich, straightforward accounts of participants' views in their own words. The data were analyzed using the qualitative content analysis framework of Graneheim and Lundman (2004), which emphasizes identifying meaning units, condensing them into codes, and clustering codes into categories that form overarching themes. This framework guided the analysis by ensuring a systematic, transparent process that preserved participants' perspectives while capturing patterns across the data.

### Population and Sampling

The study population consisted of incoming third-year Bachelor of Science in Nursing students enrolled in the Nursing Research 1 course at a private university in Bulacan during the first semester of Academic Year 2025–2026. Forty-five (45) participants were selected through purposive sampling, as the study specifically sought to capture the perceptions of students who had no prior formal exposure to nursing research coursework. Purposive sampling was deemed appropriate since it is often employed to ensure that participants possess the most relevant experiences aligned with the study's objectives (Pangilinan, 2025).

The inclusion criteria were:

- Enrollment in the third-year level;
- No previous formal instruction in nursing research;
- Willingness to voluntarily participate in the study.

Participation was open to all qualified students regardless of sex or academic performance, and no incentives were provided to avoid undue influence.





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## Instruments

Data were collected through a semi-structured reflective writing guide, also referred to as an Interview Guide Questionnaire (IGQ). This researcher-developed instrument consisted of open-ended prompts designed to explore participants' prior understanding of nursing research, expectations for the course, emotional dispositions, perceived relevance to professional practice, and influencing factors shaping their current perceptions.

The IGQ underwent expert validation by two faculty members with extensive qualitative research experience and was pilot-tested with a small group of nursing students to ensure clarity, relevance, and appropriateness of prompts. This process of expert review and pilot testing reflects standard practices in instrument development, ensuring both reliability and validity in qualitative inquiry (Carvajal et al., 2025).

The final IGQ consisted of 11 open-ended items, encouraging participants to reflect deeply on both the cognitive (knowledge, awareness, expectations) and affective (attitudes, emotions, confidence) dimensions of their pre-course perceptions.

## Data Collection

Data were gathered during the first two weeks of the semester, before any lectures or instructional activities related to nursing research were delivered. After securing ethical approval and obtaining informed consent, students were invited to complete the reflection either digitally via a secure Google Form or by submitting handwritten essays placed in sealed envelopes. Each participant was instructed to respond to the prompts with honesty and depth. They were assured that their responses would remain anonymous and would not affect their academic performance or course standing in any way.

Students' reflective writings were reviewed line by line, with significant phrases or sentences related to their perceptions identified as meaning units. These meaning units were then condensed, coded, and grouped into categories, which were further abstracted into themes following Graneheim and Lundman's (2004) structured approach. Data collection continued until saturation was reached, meaning no new themes or insights emerged from the students' reflections.

## Data Analysis

The reflective texts were analyzed using qualitative content analysis, following the framework of Graneheim and Lundman (2004). This framework was well-suited to the study because it provides a clear, systematic approach for capturing both the manifest content of students' reflections and the latent meanings underlying their perceptions.

The process ensured trustworthiness in exploring pre-course expectations and involved five steps:

1. Familiarization – Reading all reflections multiple times to understand the overall content.
2. Meaning Unit Identification – Extracting significant statements related to perceptions and expectations.
3. Condensation and Coding – Reducing meaning units while preserving essential content, then applying descriptive codes.
4. Category Formation – Grouping similar codes into categories.
5. Theme Generation – Developing broader themes that reflect patterns across participant responses.

To ensure rigor, the researcher maintained a reflexive journal, conducted peer debriefing with a co-coder, and documented all coding decisions as part of an audit trail. Such strategies have been emphasized as essential for ensuring credibility and transparency in qualitative educational research (Amihan & Sanchez, 2023).

## Ethical Considerations

This study was conducted with strict adherence to ethical standards to protect the rights, dignity, and confidentiality of all participants. Participants were informed about the purpose and nature of the study, their voluntary participation, and their right to withdraw at any time without consequences. Informed consent was obtained from each participant before participation, and they were assured that their identities would remain confidential throughout the research process.

Pseudonyms were used in all documentation to protect participant anonymity. Responses were collected in secure, private settings to ensure participant comfort, and all data files were stored securely with access limited to the research team. Ethical reflexivity was also practiced to ensure that participants' voices were faithfully represented and that researcher bias did not influence interpretations. These measures fostered a respectful and trustworthy research environment consistent with ethical norms in qualitative nursing research.



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## RESULTS and DISCUSSION

The findings of this study provide insight into the initial perceptions, expectations, and emotional dispositions of incoming third-year nursing students toward nursing research before formal academic exposure to the subject. Data were derived from reflective writings analyzed through qualitative content analysis, allowing themes to emerge from participants' own words and lived perspectives. A total of 45 incoming third-year Bachelor of Science in Nursing students from a private university in Bulacan participated in the study. All participants met the inclusion criteria of having no prior formal instruction in nursing research.

**Table 1. Themes, Subthemes, and Representative Participant Quotes**

Example Participant Quotes	Categories Integrated	Subtheme	Description	Theme
P1 (Q4) – "Learn and develop research knowledge and skills that will help in my future career." P5 (Q6) – "Confident in writing from past experience, especially in creating literature reviews." P17 (Q10) – "Prepared to apply what I learn directly to patient care." P22 (Q4) – "I want to be able to do research properly and apply it to my nursing duties."	Research Skill & Knowledge Acquisition (Q4), Strength in Writing/Presentation/Reading (Q6)	<b>1.1 Acquisition of Core Research Skills</b>	Focuses on the development of essential research competencies such as writing, literature review, data analysis, statistics, and presentation skills during the course.	<b>Building Research Competence Through Skill Development and Application</b>
P31 (Q10) – "3rd year is the right time to build research foundation through experience." P40 (Q11) – "Research guides nursing actions in the real world." P7 (Q4) – "Helps improve nursing practice immediately." P36 (Q10) – "I can now connect theory and research to what I do in the clinical area."	Clinical & Academic Preparedness (Q10), Research as Essential to Nursing Practice (Q11)	<b>1.2 Application to Nursing Practice</b>	Links acquired research skills to near-term application in nursing care, such as improving clinical decision-making and patient outcomes.	
P32 (Q5) – "Curious about applying research to patient care." P33 (Q5) – "Excited to explore research topics I'm passionate about." P36 (Q11) – "Research makes me eager to contribute to nursing knowledge." P19 (Q5) – "I look forward to discovering new knowledge that could improve healthcare."	Excitement and Curiosity (Q5), Research as Personal and Professional Growth (Q11)	<b>2.1 Excitement and Curiosity</b>	Positive anticipation and eagerness to learn, driven by interest in contributing to nursing and healthcare.	<b>Navigating Emotional Responses to Nursing Research</b>
P4 (Q5) – "I'm nervous about the defense skills needed, but I'm also excited to search and answer research questions." P15 (Q5) – "Anxious about statistics and public speaking." P28 (Q5) – "Afraid of failing but still willing to try." P9 (Q5) – "Worried about the complexity of the tasks ahead."	Nervousness and Anxiety (Q5)	<b>2.2 Anxiety and Self-Doubt</b>	Reflects apprehension toward nursing research due to perceived technical demands, time pressures, or performance anxiety.	
P18 (Q5) – "Overwhelmed; hopes to enjoy course like past favorite capstone." P26 (Q5) – "Nervous at first but becoming more open-minded." P45 (Q11) – "'Keri ko to'; self-belief to face unfamiliar challenges with positivity." P8 (Q5) – "From hesitant to willing — I think I can do this now."	Mixed Feelings (Q5)	<b>2.3 Mixed or Transitional Emotions</b>	Captures coexisting or evolving emotions about research, from initial fear to optimism.	
P3 (Q7) – "Improves patient care, enables evidence-based decisions." P35 (Q7) – "Guides safe and effective interventions." P41 (Q11) – "Directs best care." P27 (Q7) – "Research keeps our practice safe and updated."	Evidence-Based Practice & Patient Care (Q7)	<b>3.1 Enhancing Care Quality and Safety</b>	Emphasizes research as the foundation for safe, effective, and updated nursing care.	<b>Research as a Catalyst for Evidence-Based Nursing and Patient Care Improvement</b>



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P16 (Q8) – "Research updates practices, e.g., no longer aspirating during IM injection."P30 (Q8) – "Helps refine nursing procedures."P26 (Q11) – "Provides guidance for improving care protocols."P22 (Q8) – "Keeps our methods aligned with the latest standards."	Patient Safety & Risk Reduction (Q8), Research as Essential to Nursing Practice (Q11)	<b>3.2 Ensuring Clinical Relevance through Updated Practices</b>	Highlights the role of research in keeping nursing practices current and clinically relevant.	
P1 (Q8) – "Vein finder helps IV insertion and reduces complications."P20 (Q8) – "NextGen app... simplifies NCPs and drug studies."P38 (Q11) – "Innovation, technology, advancement..."P36 (Q8) – "Technology can reduce workload and prevent errors."	Technological Innovations (Q8)	<b>4.1 Development and Adoption of New Tools and Processes</b>	Describes research-driven creation or integration of technology to improve nursing efficiency.	<b>Innovation and Technological Integration in Nursing</b>
P6 (Q7) – "Innovation improves patient care quality."P24 (Q11) – "Research leads to modernization in nursing practice."P9 (Q7) – "Advancement in treatments from research findings."P18 (Q11) – "Innovations inspire better nursing approaches."	Innovation & Knowledge Advancement (Q7), Research as Innovation and Progress (Q11)	<b>4.2 Advancing Nursing Knowledge through Innovation</b>	Innovation as a driver for modernizing nursing practice and advancing knowledge.	
P4 (Q9) – "Influenced by clinical instructors as role models who fact-check nursing information."P43 (Q9) – "Inspired by our prof despite not liking research initially."P8 (Q9) – "Encouraged by seniors to value research."P22 (Q9) – "Our professors show us how research connects to patient care."	Influence of Educators (Q9), Role Models and Inspiration (Q9)	<b>5.1 Educator and Role Model Impact</b>	Impact of instructors and mentors in shaping positive perceptions toward research.	<b>Influence of Educators, Mentors, and Learning Environments</b>
P3 (Q9) – "Peers inspired me to see research as fun."P35 (Q9) – "Classmates motivated me to take research seriously."P21 (Q9) – "Media showed real applications of nursing research."P17 (Q9) – "Friends shared stories of how research improved patient outcomes."	Influence of Peers & Seniors (Q9), Media and Social Media Influence (Q9)	<b>5.2 Peer and Social Influence</b>	Influence from classmates, seniors, and social media on research perceptions.	
P3 (Q6) – "Unsure about statistics, data analysis, and interpreting results."P17 (Q6) – "Weak in presentation skills."P29 (Q6) – "Not confident in writing."P12 (Q6) – "Math and statistics make me anxious."	Weakness in Statistics/Writing/Presentation (Q6)	<b>6.1 Skills and Knowledge Gaps</b>	Gaps in technical abilities such as statistical analysis, writing, and public speaking.	<b>Challenges in Research – Technical and Resource-Related</b>
P15 (Q10) – "No; still starting to grasp research basics."P28 (Q10) – "Limited exposure to actual research."P1 (Q11) – "Hard (requires understanding, skills, experience); Costly (needs money)."P37 (Q10) – "We have not yet applied much research in clinical duties."	Partial or Limited Readiness (Q10), Research as a Challenging Endeavor (Q11)	<b>6.2 Resource and Contextual Limitations</b>	Barriers arising from limited exposure, financial constraints, and time demands.	
P29 (Q4) – "Gain experience as preparation for graduate studies."P12 (Q7) – "Expands nursing career scope; important for higher positions."P33 (Q11) – "Improves professional opportunities."P20 (Q7) – "Helps me plan for my specialization in the future."	Professional Growth & Career Preparation (Q4), Career & Professional Growth (Q7)	<b>7.1 Academic Advancement and Specialization</b>	Research as a means for pursuing higher education, specialization, and leadership roles.	<b>Research as a Pathway for Lifelong Learning and Career Growth</b>





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P13 (Q11) – "Broad... Purposeful (improves healthcare)." P21 (Q11) – "Keeps nurses updated in their field." P25 (Q7) – "Essential for continuous development." P8 (Q7) – "We should never stop learning because healthcare changes."	Continuous Improvement & Adaptation (Q7), Continuous Learning & Adaptation (Q11)	<b>7.2 Ongoing Professional Development</b>	Commitment to continuous learning and adaptability in professional practice.	
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*Note.* Quotes are drawn from participants' written reflections and interview responses. Codes and categories were derived using the qualitative content analysis framework of Graneheim and Lundman (2004).

Table 1 revealed the seven interrelated themes captured incoming third-year nursing students' perceptions of nursing research before formal course exposure. Students viewed building research competence as essential, emphasizing skills in writing, literature review, data analysis, and presentation, with direct application to clinical decision-making. Emotional responses ranged from curiosity and excitement to anxiety and self-doubt, often evolving toward optimism. They recognized research as a catalyst for evidence-based care, ensuring safe, effective, and current nursing practice, and as a driver of innovation and technological integration that modernizes workflows and expands knowledge. Educators, peers, and media emerged as influential in shaping positive attitudes, while challenges included skill gaps, limited exposure, and resource constraints. Finally, students saw research as a pathway to lifelong learning and career growth, enabling academic advancement, specialization, and adaptability. Together, these insights highlight the need for instruction that strengthens technical competence while fostering emotional readiness.

### Theme 1: Building Research Competence Through Skill Development and Application

For incoming third-year nursing students, the anticipation of their first formal nursing research course was framed by a mix of aspiration and pragmatic foresight. Even before lecture exposure, participants envisioned research as both an academic skill set to be mastered and a professional asset to be applied in clinical contexts. This theme captures that forward-looking mindset, showing how students linked research competence to their academic growth, future careers, and immediate readiness for practice.

#### Subtheme 1.1: Acquisition of Core Research Skills

Several participants identified specific competencies they expected to develop, particularly those involving academic writing, literature review, and research methodology. P1 expressed the goal to "learn and develop research knowledge and skills that will help in my future career," while P5 noted being "confident in writing from past experience, especially in creating literature reviews." Both statements highlight an awareness that strong writing and analytical skills are fundamental to navigating research processes.

The literature corroborates this expectation. Mitchell et al. (2023) found that writing self-efficacy in higher education strongly predicts not only academic performance but also persistence in research-related tasks. When students enter a course with prior writing experience, as P5 described, they may possess a motivational advantage that facilitates deeper engagement. This is significant given that research engagement in nursing relies heavily on the ability to synthesize literature and communicate findings effectively (Bradshaw et al., 2021).

#### Subtheme 1.2: Clinical and Academic Preparedness

Beyond academic skill-building, participants described a desire to directly connect research knowledge to patient care. P17 stated feeling "prepared to apply what I learn directly to patient care," while P22 explained, "I want to be able to do research properly and apply it to my nursing duties." Such statements suggest that even prior to formal instruction, students perceived research not as an abstract academic exercise but as an applied practice with tangible clinical benefits.

Empirical studies support this perception. Moloney et al. (2022) reported that when research instruction is linked to clinical simulation, students demonstrate higher confidence in translating evidence into patient care decisions. Likewise, Durmuş et al. (2025) emphasized that nurses with positive attitudes toward evidence-based practice consistently deliver higher-quality care. The readiness expressed by P17 and P22 reflects a mindset aligned with these findings, wherein research is understood as an active contributor to clinical effectiveness rather than a purely academic requirement.

Taken together, the statements in Theme 1 reveal that prior to any classroom exposure, students already framed nursing research as a dual pathway: first, to acquire rigorous academic competencies such as scholarly writing and literature synthesis, and second, to integrate those competencies into clinical decision-making. Their



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perspectives align with a growing body of literature stressing the importance of early engagement with research as a way to build not only competence but also confidence in applying evidence to real-world care settings.

## Theme 2: Navigating Emotional Responses to Nursing Research

Before any lecture exposure, incoming third-year students described a rich emotional landscape around nursing research—enthusiasm and curiosity on one side, anxiety and self-doubt on the other, with many moving between the two. These pre-instruction perceptions matter because they can shape how students engage once formal teaching begins.

### Subtheme 2.1: Excitement and Curiosity

Students voiced genuine eagerness to learn and contribute. P32 was “curious about applying research to patient care,” P33 was “excited to explore research topics I’m passionate about,” P36 said “research makes me eager to contribute to nursing knowledge,” and P19 looked forward to “discovering new knowledge that could improve healthcare.” This forward-leaning outlook echoes studies showing that when nursing learners perceive clear personal and professional relevance, intrinsic motivation and engagement rise. For example, qualitative work in the International Journal of Nursing Sciences found that students are motivated when they can see how learning connects to clinical competence and future practice, and when educators foster supportive environments that enable self-directed exploration (Nakayoshi et al., 2020). These dynamics are also strengthened when teachers provide autonomy support—an approach associated with higher intrinsic motivation and better learning outcomes among nursing students (Almarwani et al., 2024). Together, these findings corroborate the participants’ anticipatory excitement as a productive starting point for research learning.

### Subtheme 2.2: Anxiety and Self-Doubt

Alongside excitement, many anticipated hurdles. P4 admitted, “I’m nervous about the defense skills needed, but I’m also excited to search and answer research questions.” P15 was “anxious about statistics and public speaking.” P28 was “afraid of failing but still willing to try,” and P9 was “worried about the complexity of the tasks ahead.” Such apprehensions are common in nursing education: a recent meta-analysis estimated mild-to-moderate anxiety levels are prevalent among nursing students, with upper-year learners often reporting more stress than lower-year peers (Vo et al., 2023). Anxiety is especially salient around communication-intensive tasks; a national survey of undergraduate nursing students found that public speaking and classroom communication were the highest-anxiety contexts, and that communication apprehension was negatively associated with communication self-efficacy (Schulenberg et al., 2024). These data align closely with P15’s concerns about statistics talks and defense presentations, suggesting that targeted support for communication and data-analysis confidence should be built into early research teaching.

### Subtheme 2.3: Mixed or Transitional Emotions

Several participants described shifting emotions—even before formal instruction began. P18 felt “overwhelmed; hopes to enjoy course like past favorite capstone.” P26 was “nervous at first but becoming more open-minded.” P45 affirmed, “Keri ko to’; self-belief to face unfamiliar challenges with positivity,” and P8 reflected, “From hesitant to willing — I think I can do this now.” This movement from hesitation toward tentative confidence matches evidence that supportive learning climates and clear relevance can nudge students from controlled or anxious engagement toward more autonomous, resilient participation (Nakayoshi et al., 2020; Almarwani et al., 2024). Practically, that means early course design should normalize uncertainty, scaffold small wins (e.g., guided literature searches, low-stakes presentations), and explicitly connect research tasks to patient care—leveraging students’ initial curiosity while buffering predictable anxieties.

## Theme 3: Research as a Catalyst for Evidence-Based Nursing and Patient Care Improvement

Even before lecture exposure, participants already framed research as the basis of safe, effective, and up-to-date nursing. Their comments tied evidence directly to day-to-day decisions and to replacing outdated procedures with current best practices, indicating a pre-instructional readiness to use research for patient benefit.

### Subtheme 3.1: Enhancing Care Quality and Safety

Participants linked research engagement with better clinical judgment and safer care: “Improves patient care, enables evidence-based decisions” (P3); “guides safe and effective interventions” (P35); “directs best care” (P41); and “keeps our practice safe and updated” (P27). These pre-course views are consistent with empirical work showing that stronger evidence-based practice (EBP) competence is associated with better safety climate and care processes. For example, a cross-sectional study of hospital nurses found that targeted EBP training under the Best Practice Spotlight Organization program was associated with higher EBP competence and a more supportive practice





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environment—conditions that underpin safer, more consistent care (Fernández-Castro et al., 2023). Large U.S. survey data further show substantial EBP competency gaps among practicing nurses, with authors warning that such deficits threaten quality and safety—underscoring why students' early, evidence-oriented mindset matters (Melnik et al., 2018). Together, the participants' statements and the literature converge on the same message: when nurses can access, appraise, and apply evidence, the likelihood of safe, reliable care improves.

### **Subtheme 3.2: Ensuring Clinical Relevance through Updated Practices**

Students also recognized research as the engine for updating procedures: "Research updates practices, e.g., no longer aspirating during IM injection" (P16); "helps refine nursing procedures" (P30); "provides guidance for improving care protocols" (P26); and "keeps our methods aligned with the latest standards" (P22). Scholarly reviews likewise note that aspiration before intramuscular vaccination had not been recommended even prior to the pandemic because evidence of benefit was lacking (Rzymiski & Fal, 2022).

Across both subthemes, incoming students already conceptualize research as both compass and corrective: it orients everyday care toward the best available evidence and replaces legacy routines with validated approaches. This alignment between learner expectations and the external evidence base is a strong platform for the course to build EBP skills that translate directly into quality and safety at the bedside.

## **Theme 4: Innovation and Technological Integration in Nursing**

Even before formal exposure to nursing research lectures, students articulated a vision of research as an active engine for healthcare innovation. They did not limit this to abstract knowledge production; rather, they framed research as a source of practical solutions—from bedside devices to systemic modernization—that can directly improve patient outcomes, optimize workflows, and reduce clinical errors.

### **Subtheme 4.1: Development and Adoption of New Tools and Processes**

Participants highlighted tangible technologies they believed could emerge from or be improved through research. P1 shared, "Vein finder helps IV insertion and reduces complications," associating innovation with procedural safety and success rates. P20 mentioned the "NextGen app... [which] simplifies NCPs and drug studies," seeing technology as a means to streamline care planning and pharmacology review. P36 emphasized that "technology can reduce workload and prevent errors," while P38 encapsulated this vision with "innovation, technology, advancement..." suggesting a broad embrace of progress. Research supports these expectations. Meta-analyses indicate near-infrared (NIR) vein visualization can reduce procedure time and number of attempts in pediatric cannulation, improving patient comfort (Ng et al., 2024), though effectiveness varies with patient age and vascular difficulty (Yalçınli et al., 2022). On the informatics side, mobile nursing documentation platforms have been shown to significantly reduce time spent on charting and improve data accuracy (Ehrler et al., 2021), while secure smartphone systems improve intra-team communication and response times (Wu et al., 2010). These findings reinforce participants' belief that well-designed tools, grounded in research, can meaningfully enhance efficiency and safety—but also point to the need for careful evaluation before widespread adoption.

### **Subtheme 4.2: Advancing Nursing Knowledge through Innovation**

Students also described innovation as a pathway for ongoing improvement in nursing practice. P6 stated, "Innovation improves patient care quality," while P24 observed, "Research leads to modernization in nursing practice." P9 identified "advancement in treatments from research findings," and P18 reflected that "innovations inspire better nursing approaches." These statements reflect an intuitive understanding that research is iterative—constantly informing new interventions, refining protocols, and integrating technology into care. Literature affirms that a strong organizational culture of innovation accelerates evidence uptake and practice transformation. O'Hara et al. (2022) highlight that academic–practice partnerships and leadership engagement are essential for sustaining innovation. Rylee and Cavanagh (2023) similarly found that nurse-led innovations, when supported by institutional structures, can improve both care quality and staff satisfaction. Decision-support systems are one example: systematic reviews show they can translate complex research evidence into actionable, patient-specific recommendations, improving decision quality when properly integrated into workflows (Sutton et al., 2020).

Students' pre-course perspectives reveal a readiness to connect research directly with tangible clinical innovations, both in tools and in practice models. Their expectations align with a growing body of evidence that, when guided by rigorous evaluation and thoughtful implementation, research-driven technologies and innovations can improve efficiency, reduce errors, and enhance patient care. This positions them well for a research curriculum that emphasizes not only how to conduct studies, but also how to translate findings into everyday practice.



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### Theme 5: Influence of Educators, Mentors, and Learning Environments

Before formal instruction, students identified the people and contexts that shaped their initial views on research. These included faculty role models, clinical mentors, peer networks, and even media portrayals—factors that made research feel relevant, approachable, and integral to nursing.

#### Subtheme 5.1: Educator and Role Model Impact

Several participants credited their educators and mentors with inspiring them to value research. P4 shared being “influenced by clinical instructors as role models who fact-check nursing information,” P43 described being “inspired by my professor despite not liking research initially,” P8 said they were “encouraged by seniors to value research,” and P22 observed that “our professors show us how research connects to patient care.” These accounts echo findings that visible role modeling and mentorship significantly boost students’ research skills, confidence, and engagement. For example, Melnyk et al. (2021) found that strong evidence-based practice (EBP) culture and mentorship predict higher EBP implementation, job satisfaction, and retention.

#### Subtheme 5.2: Peer and Social Influence

Peers and social connections also played a motivational role. P3 said “peers inspired me to see research as fun,” P35 explained “classmates motivated me to take research seriously,” P21 noted “media showed real applications of nursing research,” and P17 recounted that “friends shared stories of how research improved patient outcomes.” Peer learning environments, as Stone et al. (2013) showed, can increase competence, reduce anxiety, and normalize engagement with challenging content. Likewise, media exposure to nursing research—as highlighted in integrative reviews (Ross & Burrell, 2019)—can enhance perceived relevance and inspire students to connect research with real-world patient care.

Students’ openness to research is shaped long before formal coursework, influenced by educator role modeling, peer support, and media narratives. This suggests that integrating structured mentorship, peer collaboration, and authentic research storytelling into curricula could further embed a positive research culture.

### Theme 6: Challenges in Research – Technical and Resource-Related

Even before entering their nursing research course, participants identified barriers they anticipated in engaging with research. These concerns spanned technical skills, prior exposure, and contextual limitations that could shape their readiness and performance.

#### Subtheme 6.1: Skills and Knowledge Gaps

Several students expected difficulty in mastering core research skills. P3 shared being “unsure about statistics, data analysis, and interpreting results,” P17 admitted “weak in presentation skills,” P29 felt “not confident in writing,” and P12 explained that “math and statistics make me anxious.” These anxieties align with findings that statistical apprehension is common among nursing students, often linked to lower research self-efficacy (Onwuegbuzie & Wilson, 2003; Papanastasiou & Zembylas, 2008). Research also shows that targeted, scaffolded instruction in statistics and academic writing can reduce anxiety while improving performance (Ryan, 2016).

#### Subtheme 6.2: Resource and Contextual Limitations

Others anticipated structural barriers. P15 admitted, “still starting to grasp research basics,” P28 noted “limited exposure to actual research,” P1 remarked that research is “hard (requires understanding, skills, experience); costly (needs money),” and P37 observed, “we have not yet applied much research in clinical duties.” These reflect broader patterns in nursing education: limited experiential opportunities (Florin et al., 2012) and systemic barriers such as workload, cost, and lack of mentorship (Kajermo et al., 2010). Without early, practical exposure to real-world research and institutional support to address costs and time demands, students may struggle to bridge theory to practice.

These insights suggest the need for curricula that directly address both skill development and systemic barriers—integrating early, low-stakes research experiences with targeted training in statistics, writing, and presentation, alongside resource-conscious program design.

### Theme 7: Research as a Pathway for Lifelong Learning and Career Growth

Incoming third-year nursing students—interviewed before any formal research lectures—already framed research as a springboard for further study and a durable professional habit. Their comments showed two intertwined strands: research as a ticket to advanced roles and specialization, and research as a mindset that keeps practice current across a career.

#### 7.1 Academic Advancement and Specialization



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Students consistently linked early research engagement to future degrees and focused careers. P29 (Q4) shared, "Gain experience as preparation for graduate studies," while P12 (Q7) emphasized that research "expands nursing career scope; important for higher positions." P33 (Q11) added that research "improves professional opportunities," and P20 (Q7) saw it as a way that "helps me plan for my specialization in the future." Read together, these pre-instruction statements portray research not as a hurdle but a ladder, echoing evidence that structured undergraduate research exposure strengthens the pipeline toward advanced study and leadership trajectories in nursing (Smith et al., 2016). In parallel, global standards argue that baccalaureate programs should cultivate scholarly competencies precisely because lifelong scholarship underpins role advancement and system-level contribution (Baker et al., 2021).

## 7.2 Ongoing Professional Development

Students also described research as a habit that sustains safe, up-to-date care. P13 (Q11) called research "Broad... Purposeful (improves healthcare)," P21 (Q11) noted it "keeps nurses updated in their field," P25 (Q7) labeled it "essential for continuous development," and P8 (Q7) reminded, "We should never stop learning because healthcare changes." These expectations align with studies showing that positive attitudes and capability beliefs toward research during training predict intentions to integrate evidence later in practice (Labrague et al., 2020), and that undergraduates are generally favorable toward research use but need curricular and clinical supports to sustain it beyond graduation (Ryan, 2016). Together, the students' voices and the literature converge on a practical takeaway: pre-lecture messaging that frames research as purposeful and career-enabling—paired with scaffolded opportunities to practice EBP tasks—can seed durable professional growth behaviors (Baker et al., 2021; Labrague et al., 2020; Ryan, 2016).

## Conclusions

This study revealed that incoming third-year nursing students, even before formal research instruction, already hold nuanced perceptions of nursing research that blend enthusiasm, curiosity, and professional ambition with apprehension and skill-related concerns. They view research as both an academic competency—encompassing writing, literature review, and data analysis—and a vital tool for enhancing patient care, driving innovation, and ensuring evidence-based practice. Influences from educators, peers, and prior learning experiences shape these early attitudes, while anticipated challenges center on statistics, writing, and resource limitations. Recognizing research as a pathway to lifelong learning, career advancement, and continuous professional development, students demonstrate a readiness that can be nurtured through targeted instruction. These insights underscore the importance of designing nursing research curricula that not only develop technical proficiency but also address emotional readiness, mentorship, and practical application, ensuring that early perceptions translate into sustained engagement and evidence-informed practice.

## Recommendations

In light of the findings, it is recommended that nursing programs implement structured orientation modules on research at the start of the third year to bridge the gap between students' pre-course perceptions and course demands. These modules should include interactive workshops on research writing, literature review, and basic statistical concepts to address identified skill gaps. Faculty should integrate case-based learning that explicitly connects research outputs to real patient care improvements, thereby reinforcing relevance and application. Establishing a peer mentoring system—where senior students share practical strategies for managing research tasks—can help reduce anxiety and build confidence. Additionally, creating accessible "research resource hubs" within the college, offering statistical software tutorials, sample proposals, and funding guidance, can alleviate resource-related barriers. Finally, recognizing students' early curiosity and professional aspirations, programs should provide opportunities for them to present preliminary research ideas in low-stakes settings, fostering a safe environment for feedback and progressive skill development.

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