

Servant Leadership in Nursing Students: Changing to the New Era

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Abstract

The global pandemic of COVID-19 has resulted in changes in the health service system requiring reliance on new work methods, new cognitive processes and new behavior. Nurses take on key caregiving roles in caring for the entire global population. And in a decade of changes in health services, servant leadership is considered an increasingly important leadership role for nurses. This study aimed to explore servant leadership characteristics among nursing students in this new era. A qualitative thematic analysis of interviews was used to evaluate the key aspects of servant leadership characteristics of nursing students. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with seven subject matter experts from January 2022 to March 2022 in Thailand. Data were analyzed manually using thematic analysis. All

seven nursing experts offered the same opinion that the characteristics of servant leadership of nursing students in the new era consisted of seven main characteristics. Nurses should have a nursing mindset expressing personal humbleness with knowledge and nursing practice based on a foundation of professional ethics that make them credible and trustworthy, empowering service recipients as people with far-reaching vision and foresight. Servant leadership is the core of nursing students in the new era, so professors and instructors should foster servant leadership in nursing students in combination with professional practical training to prepare nursing personnel with competence to keep up with changes.

Keywords: Leadership, Servant leadership, Nursing students, Changing to the new era

1. Introduction

COVID-19 outbreaks in every country worldwide (WHO, 2020a) have resulted in global changes. People in this era have to adapt to live and work to the best of their abilities in their professional fields, including the nursing profession, which has also received direct impact. As a result of this impact, professional nursing organizations must adjust the health service system in the new standard era. In a world where health service systems are changing, there is an urgent need to produce nursing graduates for an acutely changing health service system in this new era. Thus, nurses need to design learning management that enables nursing graduates to administer nursing aimed at meeting the needs of a “new normal” society and being a key force in people’s health care (Thailand Nursing and Midwifery Council, 2021a). In addition, the decade of change in 2020 for nurses and midwifery marks the 200th anniversary of Florence Nightingale, the mother of nursing all over the world (Salvage & Stilwell, 2018). These years of changes in health need to rely on new work methods, new cognitive processes, and new behavior (WHO, 2020b). Nurses are considered people who play critical roles in the health care of the global population. Caregiving focuses on nurses who possess health leadership qualities enabling quality care for service recipients. Nursing leadership comes in a variety of forms. Nevertheless, in this decade of changes concerning the health problems of the world, “Servant Leadership” is considered a basic form of leadership because servant leadership fosters and develops other people to achieve maximum personal competence by caring for service recipients efficiently, which will result in service recipients receiving safe and satisfactory care (Catherine, 2020).

Nursing education management aims to produce graduates with essential competencies to meet the needs of society and the people who employ graduates. Courses are geared toward developing learners, so they gain professional competencies to build confidence that they will provide patients with safe service provision by providing holistic physical, mental and spiritual care for people, families, and communities (Filej & Kaucic, 2013). These competencies also include support and encouragement to help patients quickly recover (Ahmann & Dokken, 2012). Many times, however, we find conflicts between nurses and patients with frequent expressions of inappropriate behaviors. Furthermore, a survey was administered by using questionnaires with open-ended questions for 60 employers of nurses from hospitals under the responsibility of the Ministry of Public Health, university hospitals, hospitals under the Thai Ministry of Defense/Ministry of the Interior, and private hospitals in

June 2020 found that the nursing graduate competencies surveyed education and the bachelor degree level and the needs of people who employ graduates. According to the findings, the mean scores were moderate (Thailand Nursing and Midwifery Council, 2021b). And research reports about the assessment of graduate quality based on the framework of national quality standards for higher education and desired graduate qualities based on the identity of the Royal Thai Air Force Nursing College, it was found that graduates assessed themselves based on desired graduate qualities based on the identity of the Royal Thai Air Force Nursing College in the aspect of military leadership with the lowest mean score (Pheungsawan & Buncharoenpannich, 2017).

Furthermore, based on self-assessment reports by the Faculty of Nursing at two public institutions of higher that were new institutions with no graduates yet, the assessments for producing graduates were found to be satisfactory (Faculty of Nursing, 2021a, 2021b). Nevertheless, the problems in managing instruction in nursing science continue to focus on content-based learning. Therefore, it is highly challenging to have graduates attain servant leadership qualities (Thailand Nursing and Midwifery Council, 2021a); even though students engage in practical learning in patient wards and engage in actual practice with patients, this is done in the form of learning that continues to focus on nursing practice by following orders to ensure that the training is completed on time. Therefore, the outcomes fail to solve the problems, enabling nursing students to attain servant leadership skills truly.

This article was written to introduce servant leadership qualities among nursing students in a new era of society. This study will employ qualitative research as its research procedures, which will obtain data directly aligned with the actual situation from the viewpoints of the experts so that the data can be made into guidelines for the development of more efficient practical education management, and the guidelines can be used in assessing the quality of nursing students in the future.

2. Method

2.1 Design

This study was qualitative research about the servant leadership of nursing students in a new era of change.

2.2 Population and Sample

Sample: The key informants were selected by purposive sampling and divided into the following two groups (Table 1): (1) a group of four qualified experts in education and (2) a group of three employers of graduates, namely one nursing administrator at a public hospital, one medical executive at a private hospital and one owner of an elderly care center.

Table 1. Participants' characteristics

Participant Code	Sex	Age (years)	Education Level	Participant Type	Workplace	Length of work (years)
P1	Female	59	Ph.D Nursing	Asst. Prof	RMUTT	37
P2	Female	49	Ph.D Nursing	Asst. Prof	KKU	27
P3	Female	44	Ph.D Nursing	Asst. Prof	CTU	22
P4	Male	46	Ph.D Nursing	Nursing Instructor	MSU	24
P5	Female	53	M.N.S. (midwifery)	Head Nurse	KKH	31
P6	Female	57	M.N.S. (Nursing Management)	Head Nurse	BH	35
P7	Female	46	Bachelor of Nursing	Business owner (Elderly care center)	KKN	24

2.3 Data Collection Tools

The instrument used in data collection was a semi-structured interview guide containing four themes. The questions were about nursing students' servant leadership qualities and recommendations. The questions were obtained from concepts of Patterson's Servant Leadership Theory (Patterson, 2003). The interview guide passed testing for content validity and language suitability by five experts and was further tried with three nursing instructors. In addition, a record form and audio recorder were used to collect complete data from the interviews.

2.4 Data Analysis

Data collection and analysis methods: The researcher collected data in person between January and March 2022. The interviews with the seven qualified experts took approximately one hour per interview until the data collection was complete in line with the set purposes for the study. Before stopping the interviews, the researcher summarized the stories provided and had the key informants confirm them for accuracy. The researcher then considered related theories, checked the research question (Table 2), conducted the research, collected the data, and analyzed the data obtained and corresponding results. Next, an exploratory qualitative thematic analysis reflecting each of Patterson's seventh stages (Patterson, 2003) was completed, and representative interview quotes were selected to illustrate central themes.

Table 2. Themes and subthemes

Sub Themes		Theme
a.	Servant Leadership important to the nursing profession	The importance of servant leadership to the nursing profession.
a.	Nursing students have servant leadership	Servant leadership with nursing students
a.	Altruism	Servant leadership components of nursing students
b.	Empowerment	
c.	Humanity	
d.	Exhibit love	
e.	Service	
f.	Trustworthy	
g.	Visionary	
a.	Characteristics of servant leadership among nursing students	Servant leadership characteristics of nursing students

Ethical Considerations: This research project was considered and certified by the Institutional review board on research involving human subjects, Srinakharinwirot University, project code SWUEC-G-002/2565, and permission was granted to conduct the research before commencing with the process of requesting consent by explaining the research objectives, research procedures, reasons for selection, rights of the data informants to participate or withdraw from the study at any time with no impact whatsoever. The researcher also requested permission for audio-visual recording. Discussion or dissemination of the data obtained was in group form, and the destruction of the data will maintain data confidentiality for three years after the completion of the study. The researcher gave the key informants opportunities to ask any questions they might have and give them time for review and consideration before making any decisions. Once the key informants consented to participate in the study, they signed informed consent forms. They made appointments for days, times, and places to provide data convenient for the informants.

3. Results

According to a systematic thematic analysis of the interviews of the seven subject matter experts, the themes emerging from the interviews were organized by using Patterson's seventh-stage paradigm.

3.1 Altruism

The qualified experts believed that nursing students need to gain qualities or behaviors expressing their primary adherence to collective interests and not view personal gain. Instead,

nursing students need to sacrifice without consideration for personal gain to be obtained. They also need to develop personal knowledge and the ability to apply knowledge gained in helping other people more, serving collective and social interests (Box 1).

“Things that might results in personal benefits if costs are generated for other people.”

“Helping other people, even if there are some personal costs.”

“Recognizing collective interests is a leadership quality and will help reduce selfishness.”

“Leaders have to develop personal knowledge, so that knowledge can be applied to helping others without demanding personal benefits.”

Box 1. Interview Quotes: Altruism

3.2 Empowerment

Empowerment is a quality specific to nursing students in the new era. In building empowerment for service recipients and their families, be aware of self-capacity concerned with self-care. Empowering service recipients draw upon self-capacity in living or improving health that behavior, which can be achieved by advising service recipients about sources of helpful information, offering opportunities to learn and promoting accurate practice, which will also increase opportunities to make decisions about the proper selections. Thus empowerment also includes the expressions of nursing students in accepting the values, beliefs and decisions of patients and their families (Box 2).

“Respect and don’t make decisions about other people.”

“Build relationships that make other people feel comfortable.”

“Emphasize the strengths and abilities of other people.”

“Support and promote participation in the decision-making of others.”

“Servant leaders have to possess skills in remedying and recovering the mental states of service recipients, so their suffering, stress, anxiety and mental losses are relieved, so service recipients can live their lives amidst the physical and mental crises of illness and injury.”

Box 2. Interview Quotes: Empowerment

3.3 Humanity

Nursing students need to be humble people with credibility and trustworthiness. They also need to respect people with more seniority, be polite and respectfully give dignity to others. They must express willingness to provide services with love, mercy and respect for others. They need to be humble by considering patients’ cultural diversity and privacy, paying attention to every problem experienced by service recipients and other people involved (Box 3).

“Respect people with more seniority.”

“Be humble by giving consideration to patients’ cultural diversity and privacy.”

“Be polite in respectfully giving dignity to other people.”

Box 3. Interview Quotes: Humanity

3.4 Exhibit Love

Nurses are aware that the nursing profession serves other people or means that they provide valuable nursing services. As a result, nursing services come from the heart as something nurses need to give to patients, so patients’ goals of being cured of their illnesses and having

a good quality of life can be achieved. Nursing students in this new era need to be people who exhibit attentive care for others at all times, whether service recipients or colleagues and must be based on a foundation of mercy and sincerity in care (Box 4).

“Nurses are aware that the nursing profession serves others or means that they provide valuable nursing services. As a result, nursing services come from the heart as something nurses need to give to patients, so patients’ to be cured of their illnesses and have good quality of life can be achieved.”

Box 4. Interview Quotes: Exhibit Love

3.5 Service

Health services are at the hearts of nurses. Nurses need to administer nursing care with love, mercy, attention to the suffering of service recipients, and sincerity in providing care. Service provision needs to exhibit willingness and nursing practice meeting professional standards for the safety of patients with adherence to patient-centered care and respect for patients’ rights with the provision of nursing care under nursing standards with ethics, morals, and codes of conduct for the nursing profession under the laws governing the profession. Nurses also need to be aware of self and other matters in general, including awareness about ethics, morals, codes of conduct for the nursing profession, respect for the rights of patients and respect for differences in patients, whether concerning beliefs, religions or cultures (Box 5).

“Provide services with willingness, enthusiasm and attentive listening.”

“(Nurses) are people who have to give attentive care to other people by exhibiting attentive care of others at all times, whether service recipients or colleagues based on a foundation of mercy and sincerity in care.”

“In providing nursing services, nurses need to have awareness of self and other matters in general with awareness of ethics, morals and codes of conduct for the nursing profession.”

Box 5. Interview Quotes: Service

3.6 Trustworthy

Trustworthy is a quality of nursing students in the new era who exhibit credibility and trustworthiness for other people to accept them as knowledgeable people in the nursing profession as people with ethics and codes of conduct for the nursing profession until they are accepted for possessing the following three dimensions: dependability, confidence and confidentiality of information (Box 6).

“Exhibit credibility and trustworthiness.”

“Acceptance for possessing the following three dimensions: dependability, confidence and confidentiality of information.”

Box 6. Interview Quotes: Trustworthy

3.7 Visionary

New era nursing students need to be visionary with the foresight to develop the profession and organizations with growth and progress in keeping up with constant changes. New era nursing students also need the ability to set clear goals and guidelines in working together appropriately with projections of potential problems and barriers while planning creative solutions (Box 7).

“(Nurses) need to be visionary with foresight.”

“Plan work in advance, visualize the success of the organization and plan creative solutions to problems.”

Box 7. Interview Quotes: Visionary

4. Discussion

This study aimed to explore the characteristics of servant leadership in new-era nursing students. The author found that, based on the viewpoints of qualified nursing experts, great importance is given to the servant leadership of nursing students. New era health service provision when health service systems are undergoing these sudden changes requires the health service system to have nurses who possess true love for nursing service provision,

providing nursing with a willing heart, humbleness, trustworthiness, honesty, recognition of collective interests and empowerment of service recipients and colleagues as people with far-reaching vision and foresight. The characteristics above are a core value of the nursing profession.

Servant leadership is an essential model for new-era nurses who dare to think, make decisions and search for new methods and practices for good nursing quality (Fahlberg & Toomey, 2016). In addition, servant leadership causes nurses to engage in innovative cognitive processes to create new things and enhance job performance. The findings of this study correspond with the findings of a study by Catherine (2020) who studied the servant leadership roles that strengthen professional nursing organizations, finding that the characteristics of servant leadership are people-specific, unique qualities and that servant leaders have multi-dimensional competencies (Coetzer, Bussin, & Geldenhuys, 2017). These findings correspond with a study by Akbar et al. (2022). They found the core of managing the prevention of COVID-19 outbreaks among community nurse practitioners to be work coordination, which is a competency of servant leaders (Akbar, Juniarti, & Yamin, 2022; Coetzer, Bussin, & Geldenhuys, 2017).

The current study revealed that servant leadership could continually help nursing personnel gain professional advancement and self-improvement. For nursing students, achieving servant leadership is the process of developing nursing students to understand that servant leadership in the nursing profession means providing services for both healthy and sick or injured service recipients. Service provision in the nursing profession is a participatory process of teamwork in providing care based on the rights of patients, ethics, morals, and codes of ethics for the nursing profession focused on or targeted at ensuring that the services received by service recipients have good quality with standards and safety.

This study also found that nurses who possess servant leadership, besides possessing skills in empowering other people, also require skills in persuasion and negotiation. The persuasion process involves skills requiring use with service recipients so that service recipients can modify behavior in health care. Thus, service recipients can engage in the proper self-care behavior and recognize the importance of changes in behavior to improve servant leadership. As for persuasion or negotiation with colleagues, these skills need to be used so colleagues have opinions or practices aligned with policies and work development directions or to ensure that organizations achieve goals together, which is creative persuasion.

According to the findings, servant leadership is a core value in the service provision of professional nurses. Servant Leadership is an essential characteristic for service providers (Patterson, 2003; Savel & Munro, 2017). The primary role of servant leaders is to develop other people, so they can achieve maximum human capacity and promote and support service recipients in expressing their own needs, including serving as volunteers (Patterson, 2003; Savel & Munro, 2017; Greenleaf, 1977). In addition, servant leaders can promote nurses to express self-worth (Fahlberg & Toomey, 2016). These findings correspond with the findings of Jit et al. (2017), who stated that servant leadership is a characteristic of nurses who express empathy with service recipients and recognize the interests of others, which will help

promote empowerment for work strength, foster a sense of “unity, cooperation and sustainable relationships” (Jit, Sharma, & Kawatra, 2017), which is considered the best model of servant leadership for health care organizations, because the focus is on team strength and working together, building credibility and meeting the needs of service recipients. Servant leaders can make an organization grow and advance with increased quality in the care of service recipients (Trastek, Hamilton, & Niles, 2014; Schwartz & Tumblin, 2002).

The results of the present study showed that the servant leadership of nursing students is essential. Nursing students only possess servant leadership as only something they express. Nursing students do not know whether they are servant leaders. If viewed in terms of servant leadership concepts and theories, instruction in nursing graduate courses and learning can develop students in every aspect of giving students servant leadership. Nevertheless, servant leadership cannot be practiced overnight but can be learned and practiced. Nursing personnel are considered health personnel with a vital role in the health system. Leadership is a professional identity in nursing (Landis et al., 2022). Furthermore, servant leadership is a core value of the nursing profession leading to professional advancement (Catherine, 2020; Trastek, Hamilton, & Niles, 2014).

The main strength of this study was that it presented the characteristics of servant leaders from the viewpoints of qualified experts who found the main characteristics of servant leadership among nursing students are service, empowerment, humanity and altruism, followed by trustworthiness, love and far-reaching vision. Nevertheless, some characteristics are essential to shaping nursing students possessing complete servant leadership characteristics.

The findings of this study revealed that the servant leadership of nursing students is vital to the development of health service systems in the new era. The challenge in taking actions aimed at visualizing the future of organizations and the success of solid health service systems requires nursing personnel with both knowledge and ability inadequate nursing service provision with a willingness to provide nursing for service recipients with their hearts. Therefore, it is challenging for the people producing nursing graduates to determine how to produce them with knowledge in combination with intelligent practice and servant leadership in the new era, so changes occur in the health service system.

5. Conclusion

Servant leadership is a core value for nursing students in the new era. Professors and instructors should foster servant leadership in nursing students in combination with professional skills training to prepare nursing personnel with the competencies required to keep up with social changes in the new era. The findings of this study can be used as guidelines for developing courses or activities to supplement courses promoting the servant leadership of nursing students. The findings can also be used as guidelines for developing measurements of servant leadership qualities in future nursing students.

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