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Preparing nurses for safe and equitable practice is a core responsibility of nursing education in Aotearoa New Zealand.¹ Yet students can now use large language models (LLMs) to generate written outputs, such as case reports and nursing care plans, that contribute to educators' judgements about their developing reasoning and readiness for practice.² These tools can therefore weaken the evidentiary value of submitted work, as polished output may conceal weaknesses in independent reasoning.

This presentation examines that concern through an integrative review of how LLM use is reshaping undergraduate nursing students' professional formation, focusing on the relationship between LLM-supported performance and the development of capability required for practice. Guided by Whittemore and Knafl's framework,³ four databases were searched for empirical studies published between January 2022 and January 2026. Thirty-four studies from 16 countries were appraised and synthesised using reflexive thematic analysis.

The synthesis showed that gains in efficiency, confidence and academic performance were not consistently matched by stronger clinical reasoning, greater metacognitive engagement or more individualised nursing responses. Whether LLM use supported capability development appeared to depend on who remained responsible for the cognitive work. In process-oriented designs, students remained responsible for questioning and verifying generated material; in product-oriented use, more of the reasoning shifted to the tool.

These findings locate the central concern for professional formation in how LLM use redistributes cognitive agency. Because the final academic product may not reveal students' independent reasoning, this presentation argues that LLM governance should protect students' ownership of judgement by making the reasoning process assessable. Where LLMs are used, educators should require students to critically evaluate generated material and justify their final judgement, so that assessments of readiness for practice remain grounded in their own reasoning.

Keywords

Large language models, nursing education, professional formation, assessment validity, readiness for practice

References

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