

## Development of Ethical-Moral Competencies in Nursing and Health Education and Practice: An Integrative Review\*

Desenvolvimento de competências ético-morais na formação e na prática de enfermagem e saúde: revisão integrativa

*Desarrollo de competencias ético-morales en la formación y en la práctica de enfermería y salud: revisión integrativa*

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### Abstract

**Objective:** To analyze and synthesize the scientific production on the development of ethical-moral competencies in education and in the practice settings of nursing and other health areas. **Method:** An integrative literature review conducted in the Lilacs, Web of Science, Cinahl, Embase, and Pubmed databases. The time frame covered from 2000 to 2023. A total of 28 articles were selected. **Results:** Three evidence-based syntheses represent the integration of the results: development of ethical-moral competencies in education and professional practice, teaching strategies for the development of ethical-moral competencies, and ethical education and its relation to professional identity. **Conclusion:** The importance of developing ethical-moral competencies is evidenced by the ability to make ethical decisions, through critical reflection and moral judgment, aiming at the quality of care, respect, responsibility, autonomy, and professional awareness. **Descriptors:** Nursing; Ethics; Moral Development; Competency-Based Education; Bioethics

### Resumo

**Objetivo:** analisar e sintetizar a produção científica sobre o desenvolvimento de competências ético-morais na formação e nos cenários de práticas de enfermagem e outras áreas da saúde. **Método:** revisão integrativa da literatura realizada nas bases de dados Lilacs, Web of Science, Cinahl, Embase e Pubmed. Recorte temporal de 2000 a 2023. Foram selecionados 28 artigos. **Resultados:** três sínteses de evidências representam a integração dos resultados: desenvolvimento de competências ético-morais na formação e na prática profissional, estratégias de ensino para o desenvolvimento de competências

ético-morais, e educação ética e sua relação com a identidade profissional. **Conclusão:** evidencia-se a importância do desenvolvimento de competências ético-morais na capacidade de tomar decisões éticas, a partir da reflexão crítica e julgamento moral, visando à qualidade da assistência, o respeito, responsabilidade, autonomia e consciência profissional.

**Descritores:** Enfermagem; Ética; Desenvolvimento Moral; Educação Baseada em Competências; Bioética

## Resumen

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**Objetivo:** Analizar y sintetizar la producción científica sobre el desarrollo de competencias ético-morales en la formación y en los escenarios de prácticas de enfermería y otras áreas de la salud. **Método:** Revisión integrativa de la literatura realizada en las bases de datos Lilacs, Web of Science, Cinahl, Embase y Pubmed. Recorte temporal de 2000 a 2023. Se seleccionaron 28 artículos. **Resultados:** Tres síntesis basadas en evidencias representan la integración de los resultados: desarrollo de competencias ético-morales en la formación y en la práctica profesional, estrategias de enseñanza para el desarrollo de competencias ético-morales, y educación ética y su relación con la identidad profesional. **Conclusión:** Se evidencia la importancia del desarrollo de competencias ético-morales en la capacidad de tomar decisiones éticas, a partir de la reflexión crítica y juicio moral, con el objetivo de garantizar la calidad de la asistencia, el respeto, la responsabilidad, la autonomía y la conciencia profesional.

**Descriptores:** Enfermería; Ética; Desarrollo Moral; Educación Basada en Competencias; Bioética

## Introduction

The practice of health professionals requires technical and ethical-moral competencies. Moral competence is the ability to understand the ethical and moral aspects of care, to identify ethical problems, reflect on them, and make appropriate decisions, being built throughout life. Therefore, ethical education is a process that enables the development of morality and the construction of competencies.<sup>1</sup>

The development of ethical-moral competencies in health education requires effective teaching and learning, beyond theories and philosophical concepts, aimed at providing adequate environments for reflection and the construction of values. Responsibility, respect, prudence, empathy, and trust are some examples of essential moral values for training professionals sensitive to the ethical situations of practice.<sup>1,2</sup>

Reflection, moral judgment, and ethical decision-making are tools of professional nursing practice. In this sense, exposure to ethical-moral situations in

clinical practice and the analysis of ethical problems in the classroom are strategies for developing students' critical thinking.<sup>3</sup> In this sense, the development of ethical-moral competencies is directly linked to the training of critical and reflective professionals, which occurs throughout the entire educational process. This implies the inclusion of courses and activities that promote ethical reasoning and moral judgment through active and creative methodological strategies.<sup>4</sup> In this context, this integrative review aims to analyze and synthesize the scientific production on the development of ethical-moral competencies in education and practice settings of nursing and other health areas.

## **Methodology**

This study is an integrative literature review, a method that allows for the synthesis of knowledge through a systematic and categorical process.<sup>5</sup> In order to maintain methodological rigor, the research was divided into six stages: definition of the guiding question, search and selection of primary studies, data extraction, critical analysis of the studies, discussion of the results, and presentation of the review.

The research question was developed based on the "PICo" acronym (P: Population - nursing and health students and professionals; I: Phenomenon of Interest - ethical-moral competencies in nursing education and practice; Co: Context - nursing education) and consists of the following inquiry: What are the scientific evidences on the development of ethical-moral competencies in education and practice settings of nursing and other health areas?

Initially, the research question posed was "How are scientific productions addressing the professional ethical-moral development in the field of nursing and health?" In the search stage, the following databases were used as informational resources: Medical Literature and Retrieval System Online (MEDLINE), Web of Science, Latin American and Caribbean Health Sciences Literature ("LILACS"), CINAHL, PubMed, and EMBASE.

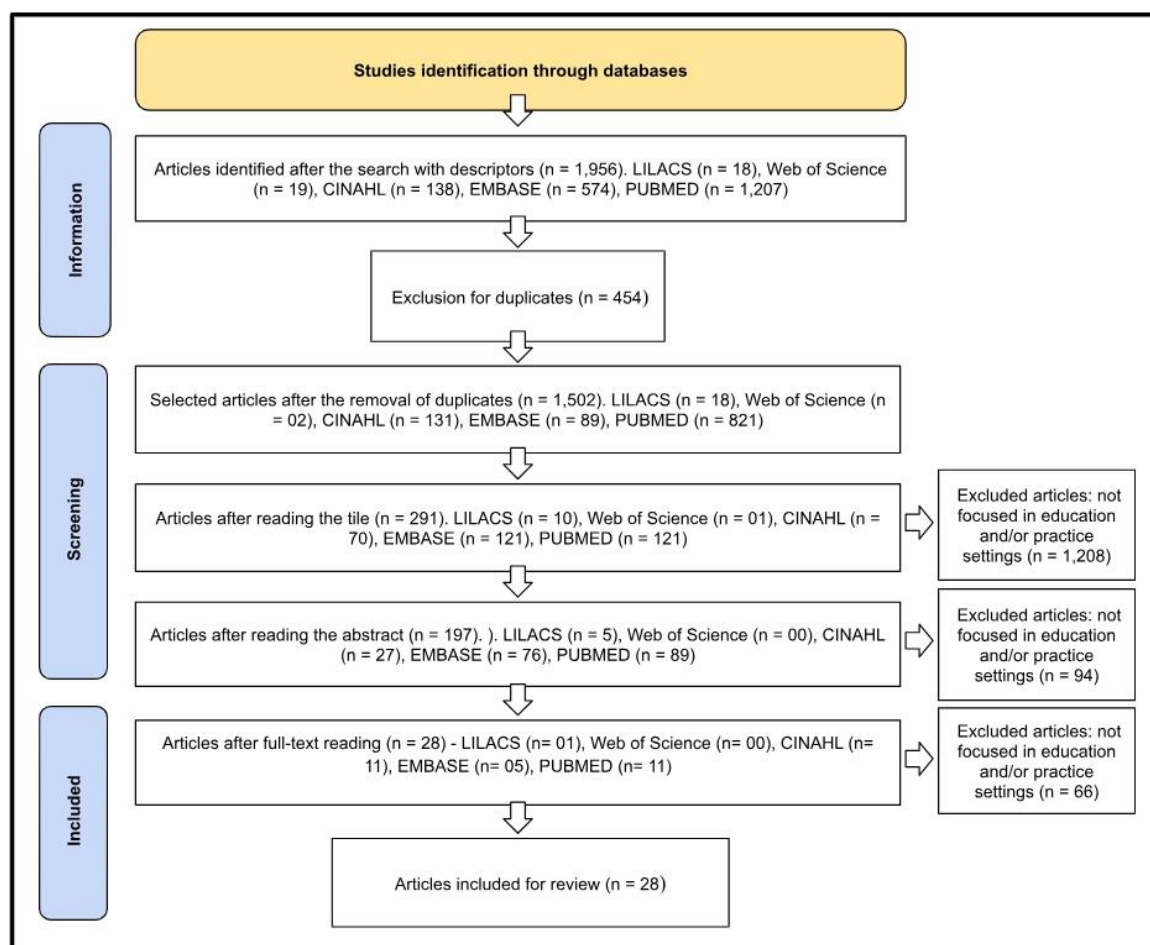
The selected time period spans from 2000 to 2023, aiming to provide an updated understanding of the state of the art regarding the investigated topic. The choice of this interval is justified by the relevance of capturing trends and advancements accumulated over these 23 years, allowing for a detailed and contextualized analysis of the available evidence in the scientific literature.

The information was collected in December 2023, with the inclusion criteria being peer-reviewed articles in Portuguese, English, and Spanish from 2000 to 2023 that contained the following Health Sciences Descriptors ("DeCS") in their titles and/or abstracts: "Professional Competence AND Principle-Based Ethics AND Nursing Ethics AND Moral Principles AND Professional Ethics". The following categories of articles were considered: research, reflection, and literature review. As an exclusion criterion, articles that were not available in full were disregarded.

The decision to use exclusively the boolean operator AND due to the highly specific nature of the addressed topic. This choice allowed for refining the search results, ensuring that only documents simultaneously addressing all descriptors of interest were retrieved. In such a restricted field of study, prioritizing precision was essential to ensure that the selected records were directly relevant to the investigation, minimizing noise and irrelevant information.

From this, in the third stage, for data extraction, information was concisely organized and gathered using the reference management software Rayyan, from the Qatar Foundation for Education group, a relevant alternative for the systematization of the study selection process in literature reviews.<sup>6</sup>

The selection of the studies is represented in the workflow below (Figure 1).

**Figure 1** - workflow for the research of articles, Florianópolis, SC, Brasil

A detailed peer evaluation of the selected articles was carried out to identify possible divergences or conflicts between the study results. Initially, titles and abstracts were analyzed based on previously established criteria, followed by full-text reading of the selected articles. This stage was conducted by two of the authors of this study, who independently and in a double-blind analysis model, classified the articles as included or excluded. In cases of disagreement in decisions, a third author was consulted to resolve conflicts. Excluded articles were those that did not address the formulated research question. Finally, the synthesis of knowledge was carried out, which is systematically presented in this review.

## Results

A total of 1,956 studies were identified. After the exclusion of duplicates and the analysis of titles and abstracts, 197 articles remained, which were read in full. Of these, 169 were excluded and 28 included (Table 1).

**Table 1** – Articles included in the integrative Review. Florianópolis, SC, Brazil, 2023

Author and Journal	Type of study	Country / Uear	Main Conclusions
Vanaki, Z., & Memarian, R; Journalof Professional Nursing. <sup>7</sup>	Qualitative Study	Iran/ 2009	Ethics emerges as a way to ensure the development of clinical competence with commitment and responsibility, enabling the application of knowledge and skills by nurses.
Sumner, J; Nursing Philosophy. <sup>8</sup>	Literature Review	USA/ 2010	Deep reflection is only possible when the nurse reaches the post-conventional moral stage and the expert level, according to Benner. Innate vulnerabilities and self-protective behaviors can restrict the capacity for self-reflection until the nurse develops confidence and mastery in practice.
Robichaux, C.; Critical Care Nurse. <sup>9</sup>	Qualitative Study	USA/ 2012	James Rest's Four-Component Model is an approach in ethical education to enhance competencies, promoting the ability of nurses to recognize and handle ethical issues.
Hickman, S. E., & Wocial, L. D; Journal Of Nursing Education. <sup>10</sup>	Qualitative Study	USA/ 2013	Team-based learning represents a way to reinforce to nursing undergraduate students the three components of moral competence: moral perception, moral judgment, and moral behavior.
Meira, M., & Kurcgant, P.; Revista da Escola de Enfermagem da USP. <sup>11</sup>	Qualitative Study	Brazil/ 2013	Educators can either facilitate or hinder the development of ethical-moral competencies in undergraduate nursing education. Therefore, ethical education should be based on strategies that prepare students to reflect and understand their professional role.
Poikkeus, T., et. al; Journal Of Advanced Nursing. <sup>12</sup>	Systematic Review	Finland/ 2013	Nursing leaders have the duty to provide strategies such as discussion groups, continuing education, ethics committees, and ethical consultations to enable nurses to acquire ethical competencies.

Ramos, F. R. de S., et. al; Revista Latino-Americana de Enfermagem. <sup>13</sup>	Qualitative Study	Brazil/ 2013	The study highlighted that ethics is a subject addressed transversally in undergraduate nursing education. Educators are fundamental actors for ethical-moral education, expressing the conflicts, values, and principles of the profession.
Buxton, M., Phillippi, J. C., & Collins, M. R; Journal Of Midwifery & Women'S Health. <sup>14</sup>	Qualitative Study	USA/ 2014	Problem-based realistic simulations with obstetric nursing undergraduate students have proven to be effective in developing ethical-moral competencies through the practice of skills in complex situations.
Schaefer, R., & Junges, J. R; Revista da Escola de Enfermagem da USP. <sup>15</sup>	Qualitative Study	Brazil/ 2014	The results of the interviews with nurses pointed to three fundamental factors in the development of ethical competencies: personal values, education, and practice. In primary care, the promotion of educational activities favors the development of competencies and contributes to addressing moral distress.
Gibbons, S. W., & Jeschke, E. A; Annual Review Of Nursing Research. <sup>16</sup>	Critical Reflection	USA/ 2016	The development of professional identity as a nurse's character, supported by organizations, encourages them to handle conflicting situations using ethical-moral competencies as tools.
Grace, P., & Milliken, A; Hastings Center Report. <sup>17</sup>	Qualitative Study	USA/ 2016	Education in ethics and bioethics is essential for nursing practice, providing the identification of ethical issues.
McAllister, M., et. al; Nurse Education In Practice. <sup>18</sup>	Qualitative Study	China/ 2016	The use of films as a teaching strategy has the potential to develop ethical behavior and prepare students for clinical practice.
Ranjbar, H., et. al; Nursing Ethics. <sup>19</sup>	Qualitative Study	Iran/ 2016	The study identified three levels of moral development in the formation of nurses' professional identity: knowing, accepting, and internalizing. Based on these levels, nursing educators should promote environments that favor the construction of moral competencies and the formation of professional identity.
Enderle, C. et. al; Revista Brasileira de Enfermagem. <sup>20</sup>	Qualitative Study	Brazil/ 2018	The use of active pedagogical methodologies encourages students to seek and construct their own knowledge. Therefore, educators need to innovate their practice with teaching strategies

			that enable students to develop ethical behaviors.
Oelhafen, S., Monteverde, S., & Cignacco, E.; Nursing Ethics. <sup>21</sup>	Qualitative Study	Switzerland 2018	Interpersonal conflicts experienced by midwives limit their autonomy and are associated with their moral distress. The origin of these conflicts is observed in situations involving less experienced midwives with lower professional competencies. Therefore, the curricula of undergraduate courses should be discussed.
Pettersson, M., Hedström, M., & Höglund, A. T.; BMC Medical Ethics. <sup>22</sup>	Qualitative Study	Sweden/ 2018	It was identified that healthcare professionals need to develop competencies to make decisions about not resuscitating oncology and hematology patients. Ethical discussions and continuing education improve competencies and help nurses act ethically.
Ranjbar, H., et.al; Journal Of Nursing Research. <sup>23</sup>	Qualitative Study	Iran/ 2018	It was evidenced that nursing students develop moral competence throughout their undergraduate education in three phases: transition, reconstruction, and moral internalization. The experiences encountered during their education facilitate the development of these competencies.
Haghighat, S., Borhani, F., & Ranjbar, H.; BMC Nursing. <sup>24</sup>	Qualitative Study	Iran/ 2020	The moral development of nursing students is closely linked to the construction of professional identity. Strengthening ethical values during undergraduate education is fundamental for the formation of essential moral competencies in nursing practice.
Macpherson, I., Roqué, M. V., & Segarra, I; Nursing Ethics. <sup>25</sup>	Qualitative Study	Spain/ 2020	The model based on the disciplines of General Anthropology and Ethics-bioethics, proposed to develop ethical competencies in the Nursing course, resulted in positive experiences for students, proving to be effective for the formation of competencies such as critical analysis and the ability to make ethical decisions.
Martins, V. S. M, et.al; Health Care Analysis. <sup>26</sup>	Longitudinal qualitative study	Portugal/ 2020	The study results showed that many nursing and medical students experience stagnation in moral competence after ethical education, suggesting an excessive emphasis on technical training. Therefore, it is essential to review curricula to include methods such as case studies and discussions of real dilemmas that aid in ethical formation.



Spekkink, A., & Jacobs, G.; Nursing Ethics. <sup>27</sup>	Scope Review	Switzerland 2020	The review of articles on educational interventions identified three dimensions for the development of moral sensitivity: increasing moral awareness, naming ethical issues, and improving moral reasoning. Despite their importance for moral competence, it is still unclear how to develop them through education.
Megregia, M. et. al; Midwifery. <sup>28</sup>	Qualitative Study	USA/ 2021	Obstetric educators highlighted shared decision-making, along with compassion and courage, as essential professional attributes for the ethical training of healthcare professionals.
Michl S, Katsarov J, Krug H, Rogge A, Eichinger T.; GmsJournal For Medical Education. <sup>29</sup>	Qualitative Study	Germany/ 2021	During the pandemic, digital education expanded. Although this type of teaching does not replace in-person experiences, educators should seek effective strategies to teach ethics, utilizing resources such as online discussions, simulations, and interactive activities to foster reflection and the exchange of ideas.
Oddvang TK, Loftfjell AL, Brandt LM, Sørensen K; International Practice Development Journal. <sup>30</sup>	Qualitative Study	Norway/ 2021	In nursing, simulation is a strategic educational method for the development of competencies such as ethical reflection and moral awareness.
Honkavuo L; Nursing Ethics. <sup>31</sup>	Qualitative Study	Finland/ 2022	The teaching of ethics must be continuous and planned, employing effective methods to develop competencies that help obstetrics students face ethical conflicts.
Bueno AA, Evangelista RA, Potrich T, Figueredo LP, Silva CCR, Silva GTR, et al; Revista Brasileira de Enfermagem. <sup>32</sup>	Qualitative Study	Brazil/ 2023	The deontological study establishes the legal and ethical parameters of professional practices that serve as the basis of ethical education. However, the greatest challenge of ethical education is to integrate theoretical concepts with the practice of care.
Mármol-López MI, et al; Frontiers in Medicine. <sup>33</sup>	Qualitative Study	Spain/ 2023	In the relationship between physiotherapist and patient, it is fundamental that professionals adopt a shared responsibility model that respects the patient's autonomy. To achieve this, it is essential to improve the ethical training of these professionals.

Prosen M, Ličen S; BMC Medical Education. <sup>34</sup>	Qualitative Study	Slovenia/ 2023	The perceptions of newly graduated nurses reveal that the transition from the academic environment to clinical practice is influenced by their expectations. Areas of competence that require more emphasis in the nursing curriculum are identified. Therefore, both faculty and students must assume responsibilities for professional development.
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It is observed in Figure 1 that approximately 39% of the articles are from the CINAHL database, 39% from PUBMED, 18% from EMBASE, 4% from LILACS, and 0% from WEB OF SCIENCE. Regarding the year of publication (Table 1), the selected studies were distributed between the years 2009 and 2023, with 39% of them published in the last 5 years.

It is found that most of the publications (82%) were available only in English, and 18% in English/Spanish/Portuguese. Geographically, the origin of the studies was distributed as follows: 25% in the United States, 18% in Brazil, 14% in Iran, and 43% in other countries (Switzerland, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Germany, Finland, Sweden, Slovenia, and China).

Regarding the analyzed population, this review included eleven studies that investigated the development of ethical-moral competencies in healthcare professionals. Among the selected studies, one covered healthcare professionals in general<sup>11</sup>, another focused specifically on physiotherapists<sup>33</sup>, two addressed both doctors and nurses simultaneously<sup>17,22</sup>, and the remaining seven focused exclusively on nursing professionals.<sup>7-9,12,15,21,34</sup>

Additionally, evaluations were conducted on how students can develop these competencies during their undergraduate studies using educational strategies. In this context, one investigation involved healthcare professionals in general<sup>16</sup>, another included nursing and medical students<sup>26</sup>, five addressed nursing students and educators<sup>10,14,19,23,29</sup>, and seven studies focused exclusively on nursing students.<sup>18,24-25,27,30-32</sup> Finally, three studies focused on the perspective of educators in the construction of ethical-moral competencies.<sup>13,20,28</sup>

The integration by similarity of the results found in these studies led to the identification of three evidence syntheses, namely: the development of ethical-moral competencies in education and professional practice, teaching strategies for the development of ethical-moral competencies, and ethical education and its relationship with professional identity.

## **Discussion**

### **Development of ethical-moral competencies in education and professional practice**

In the synthesis of evidence related to the development of ethical-moral competencies in professional practice, research has shown that healthcare professionals need conducive spaces for discussions and actions on ethical-moral issues, which contributes to the enhancement of competencies. It is suggested that participation in discussions, whether with colleagues, nursing preceptors, or educators, fosters continuous improvement and deepening of ethical competence. This interactive process, by promoting the exchange of experiences and reflections, constitutes an essential tool in the development of ethical capacity, facilitating the construction of a robust understanding and the refined application of ethical principles in professional practice.

The studies highlighted the following ethical-moral competencies: effective communication, critical reflection, ethical principles, theoretical knowledge, clinical reasoning, critical thinking, and moral judgment, as well as personal attributes such as trust, leadership, responsibility, empathy, honesty, courage, and kindness. Autonomy, the ability of professionals to actively participate in the ethical decision-making process, was identified as a value among these competencies, evolving with professional experience and ethical situations encountered in practice.<sup>8,14,19-21, 28,33-34</sup>

The ethical-moral competencies identified by the studies.<sup>8,14,19-21,28,33-34</sup> reflect a comprehensive approach to professional practice, combining technical skills, personal attributes, and fundamental values that underpin ethical behavior. Effective communication, critical reflection, and clinical reasoning, for example, are essential

pillars for resolving complex ethical dilemmas, while qualities such as empathy, honesty, and courage promote a humanized and morally responsible practice.

Among these competencies, autonomy emerges as a central value, representing the professional's ability to exercise independent ethical judgment and make decisions aligned with moral principles, even in challenging contexts. This competency, which develops gradually with experience and exposure to ethical situations in practice, is crucial for addressing the increasing complexity of modern healthcare systems.<sup>8,14,19-21,28,33-34</sup>

Therefore, promoting the development of autonomy and other ethical-moral competencies requires a welcoming and safe work environment, with initiatives that create a favorable ethical climate, contributing to the development of ethical-moral competencies. It has been identified that continuing education in ethics, as well as interdisciplinary rounds, guidance, and team meetings, contribute to the ethical construction of professionals, increasing their self-confidence to face ethical issues.<sup>7,9,14-15,19-20,34</sup>

A study based on interpretative phenomenology evidenced that the construction of ethical-moral competence is achieved through three pillars: personal values, education, and practice. Personal values are those acquired in childhood through family teachings and are shaped by social life. Education is linked to ethical education, which promotes the development of moral judgment and critical reflection. Practice involves the application and experience of ethical principles in the professional context, providing continuous learning and improvement of ethical-moral competencies.<sup>15</sup>

Based on the findings, it can be reflected that the construction of ethical-moral competencies is a continuous process that integrates personal values, ethical education, and professional practice. Values, formed in childhood and shaped by social interactions and experiences throughout life, provide the initial ethical foundation. Ethical education, in turn, offers theoretical and critical tools for moral judgment, essential for understanding dilemmas and ethical issues. Professional practice serves as a dynamic space for the application and refinement of these competencies, promoting experiential learning and strengthening autonomy and ethical sensitivity in the exercise of the profession.

In the academic setting, the formation of students as moral individuals occurs through ethical education, which helps students to build morally awareness of themselves and the collective, facilitating their ethical decision-making based on moral values built across the course. In these sense, pedagogical strategies such as discussions, debates, and critical reflections on ethical issues, as well as group work that enriches learning through the exchange of opinions, contribute to preparing students to deal with ethical problems and dilemmas in a responsible and well-founded manner.

### **Teaching strategies for the development of ethical-moral competencies**

Studies<sup>10,20,24</sup> have shown that educational programs tend to prioritize theoretical knowledge and technical skills over ethical-moral development. As a result, educators in the health field face challenges in promoting reflective activities and the application of ethical knowledge within undergraduate courses. These findings reflect a gap in the comprehensive training of health professionals. This imbalance hinders the preparation of students to deal with the complex ethical dilemmas that characterize professional practice. In light of this, moral sensitivity is the starting point for the development of ethical-moral competencies. There are three dimensions that should be considered in teaching methods: expanding moral capacity, the ability to recognize ethical issues, and improving moral reasoning.<sup>27</sup>

The expansion of moral capacity aims to build moral awareness, challenging students to recognize the impact of their values and attitudes in the professional-patient relationship. Methods such as films, simulations, and sharing experiences among students are used to stimulate students' perception. The ability to recognize ethical issues can be achieved through theories, simulations, and practical experiences during internships. This dimension seeks to establish a connection between theory and the capacity for action. The third dimension uses methods such as debates, studies, and question-and-answer sessions to strengthen moral reasoning capacity. However, this research concluded that educational programs still do not fully integrate these three dimensions of learning.<sup>27</sup>

An academic model that includes the subjects of General Anthropology and Bioethics, implemented in nursing universities in Spain, was evaluated in a study<sup>25</sup>, and the results were positive, as these courses promoted the development of ethical-moral competencies in three domains: theoretical, practical, and communicative. The theoretical domain was built through classes that addressed ethical concepts, codes, and philosophical studies. The practical domain was promoted through simulations, discussions, and reflections. Finally, the communicative domain sought the students' ability to express themselves in various situations, using debates, presentations, and dialogues.

Thus, the use of active pedagogical methodologies such as simulations, rounds, discussions, films, and supervised internships have been addressed as effective methods for the process of ethical-moral development.<sup>12-14, 18-20, 22, 29-31</sup>

Simulation is one of the most used strategies by educators, as it allows students to be the protagonists of their learning and to participate actively in the construction of their knowledge<sup>20</sup>. Clinical simulation scenarios help prepare students for the reality of practice by stimulating ethical situations commonly encountered in the daily lives of professionals. In this sense, simulation is a valuable way to educate students, as they benefit from learning and practicing, improving their competence in critical thinking and ethical conduct.<sup>30</sup>

The findings stimulate reflection on simulation as a relevant teaching strategy by providing students with the experience of practical situations that integrate action and reflection. Therefore, mistakes cease to be mere failures and become essential elements of learning, promoting critical analysis of decisions and encouraging the continuous improvement of knowledge and skills.

Research with nursing students obtained similar results, with positive responses to simulations, allowing students to develop communication and critical reflection skills in solving ethical problems.<sup>14,30</sup>

Debriefing, the feedback given after simulations, creates an opportunity for students to evaluate their performance, identifying positive and negative points. This moment is considered an integral part of the learning process and should always occur after simulations.<sup>14,30</sup> When well-structured, this process allows students to understand

their strengths and identify areas where they need improvement, promoting a view of their performance. Furthermore, it stimulates critical reflection, encouraging students to revisit their mistakes and successes, facilitating deep and meaningful learning.

This learning process, however, faces challenges in contexts such as digital education, which, despite being an innovative tool, especially during the pandemic, has reduced the spontaneity and agility of dynamic processes carried out in face-to-face groups.<sup>29</sup> Despite the relevance of this topic, the literature still shows a scarcity of studies that specifically address this issue. In this sense, there is a gap to be explored, and conducting additional investigations can substantially contribute to the advancement of knowledge in this area

### **Ethical education and its relationship with professional identity**

The evidence synthesis seeks to understand the interconnection between ethical-moral development and professional identity. Professional identity is defined as a self-perception about the profession, based on attitudes, beliefs, feelings, values, motivations, and experiences. This process is closely linked to the ethical and moral education of the student and professional.<sup>16,19,24,32</sup> The literature reveals that ethical education enables reflection on being a nurse, strengthens the understanding of social responsibility, develops the student's critical-reflective formation, and provides the incorporation of intrinsic values and attitudes of the profession.

The relationship between ethical-moral development and the phases of professional identity formation was also addressed.<sup>16,19,24,32</sup> This process occurs in three main stages: moral transition, moral reconstruction, and moral internalization. Moral transition, characterized by an initial and superficial understanding of the profession, highlights that the early years of training still present limitations in the capacity for ethical decision-making<sup>19</sup>. This finding suggests the need to strengthen ethics education at the beginning of undergraduate studies, through spaces that stimulate reflection and ethical practice from the initial stages.

The moral reconstruction phase is the moment when the internalization of the values of the profession begins and the adoption of mature characteristics of being a nurse takes place. This seems to be influenced by practical experience in clinical environments.<sup>19</sup> This corroborates the idea that contact with ethical issues in a real context is an integral part of consolidating professional identity. However, it is important to reflect on the quality of these experiences and the support provided by teachers and supervisors. The presence of qualified mentors who demonstrate ethical and reflective attitudes should be the foundation for students to absorb these values and incorporate them into their practice.<sup>16</sup>

The final phase, of moral internalization, is described as the moment when the student incorporates the values and attitudes of the profession, achieving a sense of empathy, compassion, and ethical responsibility. This stage highlights the importance of continuous learning, showing that ethical formation does not end at graduation but extends throughout the professional trajectory.<sup>19</sup>

Therefore, professional identity in nursing is consolidated as a permanent dynamic process that begins with academic training and accompanies the individual throughout their professional journey. Ethical education continues to play a central role, being essential for the update of values, attitudes, and skills that support responsible and humanized practice.

Furthermore, the importance of continuing education programs and targeted training that foster critical reflection and ethical-moral improvement of professionals already in the job market is emphasized. Such initiatives not only strengthen professional identity but also ensure that the care provided is in accordance with ethical principles.

In summary, the construction of professional identity transcends the limits of initial training, requiring an uninterrupted commitment to learning and ethics, reaffirming its role as the foundation of being a nurse throughout the entire professional life.

In this integrative review, some limitations are mentioned. One of them is that the population addressed in the reviewed studies was predominantly focused on nursing, which may limit the scope of the conclusions for other health professions.



Moreover, gaps in the research were observed, especially regarding the promotion of ethical development in professional practice.

Health professionals need ethical-moral competencies to make ethical decisions and act with responsibility and prudence. In this context, this review allows for reflection on how to develop these competencies during training, through active methodologies such as simulations and debates, and in professional practice, through meetings and discussions among teams, strengthening the capacity for autonomy and leadership to address ethical issues.

## **Conclusion**

By identifying and describing the scientific production on the development of ethical-moral competencies in training and practice settings of nursing and other health areas, 28 studies published in the last 14 years from various journals were identified. Most of the articles were conducted in the United States, with only five of them in Brazil, which demonstrates the need for greater investment in national research on the development of ethical-moral competencies in the training and practice of health professionals.

In summary, the reviewed studies highlighted the importance of developing ethical-moral competencies to promote health professionals' ability to make ethical decisions, based on critical reflection and moral judgment in everyday situations, aiming for quality in care, respect, responsibility, autonomy, and professionals' awareness. The studies also demonstrated the relationship between the development of ethical-moral competencies and the construction of professional identity.

Various teaching strategies have also been identified, such as simulations, films, and discussions, which can be used to promote the development of these competencies in undergraduate students. These active methodologies aim to transform the student into the protagonist of their own learning. In the professional field, continuing education has been pointed out as an influential factor for the ethical improvement of professionals.

The scientific production on the development of ethical-moral competencies in training and practice settings in nursing and other health areas is still incipient but

growing in relevance. Future studies are needed to explore teaching methodologies, pedagogical strategies, and practical experiences that promote ethical reflection, moral decision-making, and responsible professional conduct. Additionally, it is essential to investigate how these processes contribute to the formation of professionals better prepared to deal with ethical issues strengthening the quality and humanization of healthcare.

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