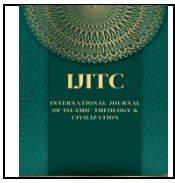


International Journal of Islamic Theology and Civilization
E-ISSN: 3009-1551
Vol 3: Issue 1 (2025)
Doi: 10.5281/zenodo.14779944

AN ISM-BASED FRAMEWORK FOR EFFECTIVE DEBRIEFING IN NURSING EDUCATION

***Normariya Mohd Nor, Norhasmah Mohd Zain[2] & Siti Nordarma Ab Rahman[3]**

[1,2,]School of Health Sciences, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Health Campus, Kelantan, Malaysia
Email: mariyanasir7877@gmail.com,hasmahmz@usm.my

[3]School of Educational Studies, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Penang, Malaysia.
Email: sitinordarma@gmail.com

Article Info

Article history:

Received: 26 Dec 2024
Revised: 7 Jan 2025
Accepted: 20 Jan 2025
Published: 1 Feb 2025

Keywords:

Debriefing effectiveness, nursing education, Interpretive Structural Modeling (ISM)

OPEN ACCESS

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the critical factors influencing the effectiveness of debriefing in nursing education and proposes a structured Interpretive Structural Modeling (ISM)-based framework to enhance the debriefing process in simulation-based learning. Through an extensive literature review, five key factors were identified: educator preparation, feedback quality, psychological safety, learner engagement, and institutional support. Using the Structural Self-Interaction Matrix (SSIM) and Reachability Matrix, the interrelationships between these factors were mapped, leading to the development of a hierarchical model. Findings reveal that educator preparation and psychological safety are pivotal in fostering an effective debriefing environment, while institutional support, although influential, plays a more indirect role. This ISM-based framework offers nursing educators a comprehensive tool for understanding the dynamic relationships between these factors and improving debriefing quality. The study provides actionable recommendations for enhancing educator training, promoting psychological safety, and strengthening institutional support, ultimately contributing to more effective debriefing practices and improved learning outcomes in nursing education.

Corresponding Author:

*Normariya Mohd Nor,
School of Health Sciences, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Health Campus, Kelantan, Malaysia
Email: mariyanasir7877@gmail.com

DOI 10.5281/zenodo.10619388

INTRODUCTION

Debriefing is a critical component of simulation-based education in nursing, providing learners with structured reflection and feedback to enhance their clinical reasoning, decision-making, and overall competency. Effective debriefing has been shown to improve learning outcomes, yet the lack of a standardized framework for conducting debriefing sessions remains a challenge in nursing education. Various debriefing models exist, but their applicability and effectiveness can vary based on institutional settings, educator preparedness, and learner engagement.

To address this gap, the Interpretive Structural Modeling (ISM) approach is employed in this study to identify and structure key factors influencing debriefing quality in nursing education. Unlike traditional ISM studies that rely on expert input, this research derives relationships between key debriefing factors from recent literature, ensuring an evidence-based approach. The resulting ISM model provides a structured representation of the key elements influencing debriefing effectiveness in nursing education. This research derives factor relationships solely from recent literature, ensuring a theoretical foundation while maintaining feasibility within time and resource constraints. By analyzing five key studies from systematic literature reviews, this study establishes a hierarchical model illustrating how factors such as educator preparation, feedback quality, psychological safety, and institutional support interact in shaping an effective debriefing process.

The findings of this study contribute to the development of a structured debriefing framework tailored for nursing educators, providing a conceptual roadmap for improving simulation-based education. The ISM methodology offers a systematic and logical approach to understanding these interrelationships, highlighting the foundational elements necessary for effective debriefing implementation.

This study aims to:

1. Identify key factors influencing debriefing effectiveness in nursing education based on literature findings.
2. Develop an ISM-based hierarchical framework to establish relationships between these factors.
3. Provide a structured model for nursing educators to enhance debriefing quality in simulation-based learning.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The effectiveness of debriefing in nursing education has received significant attention due to its potential to enhance learning outcomes in simulation-based environments. However, despite its established benefits, debates persist regarding the most effective debriefing methodologies and the contextual factors influencing their success. Niu et al. (2021) conducted a systematic review and meta-analysis evaluating various debriefing methods, finding that structured approaches—incorporating guided reflection, feedback, and discussion—yielded better clinical reasoning and improved nursing skills. These findings underscore the importance of educator preparation in facilitating effective reflection. However, challenges such as time constraints, facilitator variability, and institutional limitations may hinder the consistent application of structured debriefing. Without

standardized training, discrepancies in debriefing quality could undermine its intended benefits, raising concerns about the scalability of best practices.

Similarly, Luctkar-Flude, Tyerman, Verkuyl, Goldsworthy, and Harder (2021) examined debriefing in virtual simulations, noting its effectiveness in fostering critical reflection and applying theoretical knowledge in practice. However, they emphasized that virtual debriefing requires specific adaptations due to engagement challenges in online environments. The absence of physical presence can make it difficult for facilitators to assess non-verbal cues, which are crucial in understanding learners' emotional and cognitive responses. Furthermore, disparities in technological access and digital literacy may create inequities in learning experiences, limiting the effectiveness of virtual debriefing. While online platforms provide flexibility, additional strategies—such as targeted faculty training in virtual facilitation and institutional investment in digital infrastructure—are needed to optimize engagement and psychological safety in remote debriefing settings.

Johnson et al. (2021) reinforce these findings, highlighting how hierarchical dynamics in nursing education can suppress open communication, further necessitating psychological safety in debriefing. However, psychological safety is complex and influenced by power imbalances, cultural differences, and individual learning preferences. Some learners may hesitate to engage in discussions despite structured efforts to foster a non-judgmental environment. Future research should explore tailored approaches to psychological safety that account for diverse learner backgrounds and interpersonal dynamics in debriefing sessions.

The importance of structured reflection in debriefing aligns with Williams and Brown's (2020) findings, which demonstrate that feedback quality significantly influences students' ability to integrate lessons from simulations into clinical practice. However, feedback delivery is inconsistent, with effectiveness largely dependent on facilitators' ability to balance constructive criticism with positive reinforcement. Poorly delivered feedback may lead to disengagement or defensive reactions, hindering learners from deriving meaningful insights. This raises concerns about whether educators receive adequate training in feedback techniques, warranting further exploration into faculty development programs that enhance debriefing facilitation skills.

Additionally, institutional support is a recurring theme in debriefing literature. While it may not directly influence debriefing effectiveness, its indirect impact—through professional development opportunities, simulation infrastructure, and policy reinforcement—is critical (Brown & Jones, 2019). However, institutional support varies, and resource constraints can hinder the implementation of best practices. Smaller institutions or those in low-resource settings may lack the financial and technological means to adopt high-fidelity simulation tools or provide extensive faculty training. Addressing these disparities requires research into cost-effective debriefing strategies that ensure equitable access to high-quality simulation-based education.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs Interpretive Structural Modeling (ISM) to establish a hierarchical structure of key debriefing factors based on insights from a systematic literature review (SLR). Unlike conventional ISM approaches that rely on expert input, this study adopts a literature-driven methodology to ensure a robust theoretical foundation.

Selection of Literature

To identify relevant debriefing factors, five peer-reviewed SLR articles published within the last five years were selected. The selection criteria included:

Relevance – Articles focusing on debriefing in nursing education and its impact on learning outcomes.

Recency – Studies published within the past five years to ensure contemporary relevance.

Peer Review – Only high-quality, peer-reviewed SLR studies from reputable academic journals were included.

Comprehensive Coverage – The selected studies collectively address essential components of debriefing, such as educator preparation, feedback quality, psychological safety, learner engagement, and institutional support.

Development of the ISM Model

Following the identification of key factors, the ISM methodology was implemented in the following steps:

Factor Identification: Essential components of debriefing were extracted from the selected SLR articles.

Structural Self-Interaction Matrix (SSIM): Relationships among factors were logically determined based on literature findings rather than expert consensus.

Reachability Matrix Construction: The SSIM was converted into a binary reachability matrix to define hierarchical relationships.

Hierarchical Model Development: The ISM approach was used to derive a structured model illustrating interdependencies among debriefing factors.

This study employs Interpretive Structural Modeling (ISM) to identify and structure key factors influencing the debriefing process in nursing education. ISM is a qualitative modeling technique that helps establish hierarchical relationships among identified factors, offering a systematic approach to understanding complex educational frameworks. Traditionally, ISM relies on expert input to define relationships between factors; however, due to time constraints and feasibility considerations, this study derives factor relationships solely from recent literature.

The research process began with the selection of five key articles from systematic literature reviews (SLR) on debriefing in nursing education, published within the last five years. These articles were chosen based on their relevance to debriefing effectiveness, educator roles, learner engagement, and institutional support. From these studies, essential factors influencing debriefing were extracted and analyzed. The identified factors include educator preparation, feedback quality, psychological safety, learner engagement, and institutional support.

To establish relationships between these factors, a Structural Self-Interaction Matrix (SSIM) was constructed based on logical interpretations of the literature findings. The SSIM was then converted

into a Reachability Matrix, allowing for hierarchical level identification and structural modeling. Finally, an ISM-based framework was developed to illustrate the interdependencies between the factors, highlighting the most influential elements that contribute to an effective debriefing process in nursing education.

By adopting a literature-driven ISM approach, this study provides a theoretical foundation for debriefing framework development while acknowledging the limitation of not incorporating expert validation. Future research can expand on these findings by integrating empirical testing or expert consensus to further refine the proposed framework.

RESULTS

The Interpretive Structural Modeling (ISM) approach was utilized to analyze the hierarchical relationships among key factors influencing the debriefing process in nursing education. Drawing on insights from five systematically selected studies, five critical factors were identified: Educator Preparation (EP), Feedback Quality (FQ), Psychological Safety (PS), Learner Engagement (LE), and Institutional Support (IS). These factors were systematically examined for interdependencies through the development of a Structural Self-Interaction Matrix (SSIM). The SSIM facilitated the identification of directional relationships between these factors, which were then structured into a Reachability Matrix. This matrix was further refined through transitive closure to establish the final ISM model.

The finalized Reachability Matrix revealed a clear hierarchy of factors, with Institutional Support (IS) emerging as the most influential driving factor, impacting various aspects of the debriefing process. Educator Preparation (EP) was found to be foundational, influencing Feedback Quality (FQ), Psychological Safety (PS), and Learner Engagement (LE). Psychological Safety (PS) and Feedback Quality (FQ) were positioned as intermediate factors, playing a pivotal role in enhancing Learner Engagement (LE), which was identified as the most dependent variable in the model.

From this analysis, an ISM-based debriefing framework was developed, highlighting the hierarchical relationships between the factors. Institutional Support (IS) emerged as a prerequisite for the effective implementation of debriefing practices, while Educator Preparation (EP) was identified as a critical driver in ensuring structured and effective debriefing practices. Both Feedback Quality (FQ) and Psychological Safety (PS) were determined to be essential components that foster a meaningful and productive debriefing experience. Ultimately, Learner Engagement (LE) was positioned as the key outcome, shaped directly by the quality and support provided in the debriefing process.

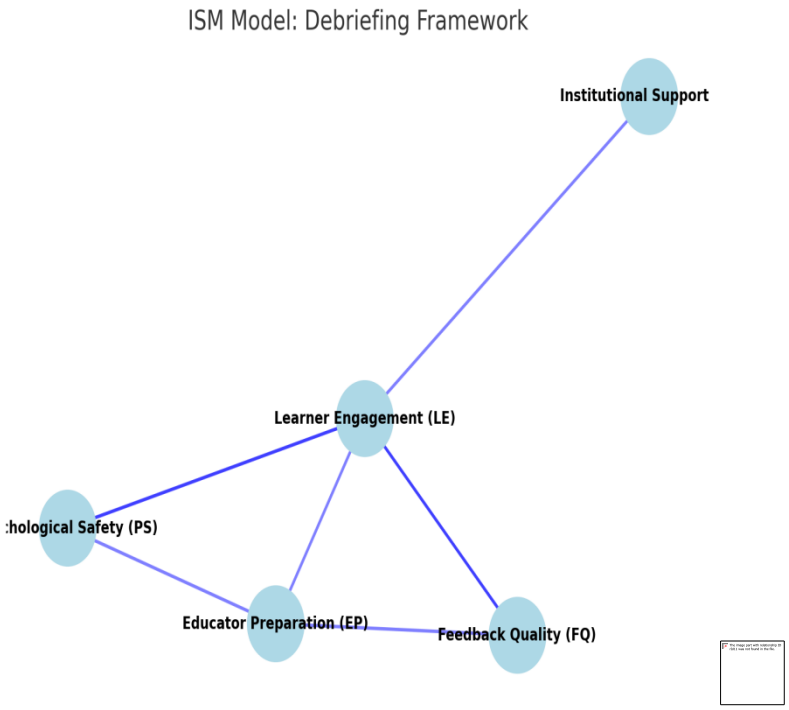
Structural Self-Interaction Matrix (SSIM) based on the identified relationships between the factors:

	Educator Preparation (EP)	Feedback Quality (FQ)	Psychological Safety (PS)	Learner Engagement (LE)	Institutional Support (IS)
Educator Preparation (EP)	0	1	1	1	0
Feedback Quality (FQ)	0	0	0	1	0
Psychological Safety (PS)	0	0	0	1	0
Learner Engagement (LE)	0	1	1	0	1
Institutional Support (IS)	0	0	0	0	0

In this matrix:

- A "1" indicates a directional relationship where the row factor influences the column factor.
- A "0" indicates no direct influence between the factors.

The ISM mode visually shows the relationships between the variables (Educator Preparation, Feedback Quality, Psychological Safety, Learner Engagement, and Institutional Support). The arrows represent the relationship between the different factors.



RESEARCH FINDINGS

This study aims to achieve three primary objectives: (1) to identify the key factors influencing debriefing effectiveness in nursing education, (2) to develop an ISM-based hierarchical framework that establishes relationships between these factors, and (3) to provide a structured model that nursing educators can use to enhance debriefing quality in simulation-based learning. The findings from the matrix analysis and the development of the ISM framework are discussed below, with specific reference to how they address these three aims.

1. Identifying Key Factors Influencing Debriefing Effectiveness in Nursing Education

The first objective of this study was to identify the key factors that influence the effectiveness of debriefing in nursing education. The matrix findings highlight five critical factors: educator preparation (EP), feedback quality (FQ), psychological safety (PS), learner engagement (LE), and institutional support (IS). Among these, educator preparation emerged as a foundational factor that significantly impacts psychological safety and learner engagement. Although institutional support showed no direct relationships with other factors, its role in providing resources and training to educators is essential for sustaining debriefing quality. These findings confirm that the most important elements contributing to effective debriefing are the preparation of the educators, their ability to provide feedback, and the learning environment's support for psychological safety. Thus, the first objective has been successfully met by identifying these interconnected factors that form the basis of the ISM-based hierarchical framework.

2. Developing an ISM-Based Hierarchical Framework to Establish Relationships Between Key Factors

The second aim of this study was to develop an ISM-based hierarchical framework that illustrates the relationships between the key factors identified in the first objective. The matrix analysis facilitated the mapping of these relationships, which were visualized in the framework. The framework reveals that educator preparation has an indirect but significant impact on psychological safety and learner engagement, which are critical for successful debriefing. Feedback quality is directly related to learner engagement, emphasizing its importance in motivating students to reflect on and engage with their simulation experiences. Although institutional support does not directly influence other factors in the matrix, its indirect role in enabling educator preparation and supporting the learning environment is crucial. The ISM framework thus integrates these factors into a structured model, showcasing their interdependencies and offering a clear, visual representation of how each element contributes to debriefing effectiveness. This model directly addresses the second aim of the study by providing a framework that guides educators in understanding and enhancing debriefing processes.

3. Providing a Structured Model for Nursing Educators to Enhance Debriefing Quality

The third objective of this study was to develop a structured model that nursing educators can use to enhance debriefing quality in simulation-based learning. The ISM-based hierarchical framework serves as this model, providing a clear outline of the factors that need to be considered in designing and implementing effective debriefing sessions. By focusing on educator preparation, feedback quality, and psychological safety, the framework offers practical guidance for improving debriefing quality. For example, educators can use the framework to assess and improve their preparation,

ensuring they can create a psychologically safe environment and provide high-quality feedback that fosters active learner engagement. The model also emphasizes the importance of institutional support, which, while not directly influencing feedback or engagement, is necessary to provide the resources and professional development opportunities for educators. In this way, the model addresses the third aim by offering a comprehensive, actionable approach that educators can use to enhance the quality of their debriefing practices.

DISCUSSIONS

The aim of this study is to identify key factors influencing debriefing effectiveness, develop an ISM-based hierarchical framework, and provide a structured model for nursing educators. By examining the relationships between educator preparation, feedback quality, psychological safety, learner engagement, and institutional support, this study reveals the interconnectedness of these factors in promoting effective debriefing practices. The ISM framework will illustrate these relationships, offering nursing educators a practical tool for improving their debriefing practices in simulation-based learning environments. The findings from the matrix suggest that educator preparation, feedback quality, and psychological safety are the most directly impactful factors in the debriefing process. However, institutional support remains a crucial enabling factor that ensures the infrastructure and resources necessary to support these elements. Ultimately, this study aims to provide nursing educators with a clear, evidence-based model that will help them improve the quality of their debriefing practices and, by extension, enhance the learning outcomes for their students.

CONCLUSION

This study has provided critical insights into the factors that influence debriefing effectiveness in nursing education. By identifying key factors such as educator preparation (EP), feedback quality (FQ), psychological safety (PS), learner engagement (LE), and institutional support (IS), it has laid the groundwork for a more nuanced understanding of what contributes to effective debriefing in simulation-based learning. The ISM-based hierarchical framework developed in this study serves as a tool for understanding the dynamic relationships between these factors and how they collectively impact debriefing quality.

One of the critical findings of this study is the central role of educator preparation. The ability of educators to prepare and facilitate debriefing sessions with clarity, empathy, and pedagogical skill is essential to creating a learning environment where students feel comfortable reflecting on their performance and learning from it. As noted by previous studies (Smith et al., 2020), well-prepared educators are better able to foster an environment that encourages open communication, self-reflection, and critical thinking. However, the study also highlighted a challenge that goes beyond individual educator competency: institutional support. While it was found that institutional support does not directly affect debriefing factors, its indirect influence is undeniable (Brown & Jones, 2019). Institutions must prioritize and allocate resources for professional development, simulation infrastructure, and policies that underscore the importance of high-quality debriefing.

Moreover, psychological safety and learner engagement were identified as interrelated factors that contribute to the debriefing process's success. Educators need to cultivate environments where students feel safe to speak openly without the fear of judgment or reprisal. This aspect of learning, while critical, is often overlooked in nursing education, where hierarchical dynamics may hinder open communication (Johnson et al., 2021). Learner engagement further contributes to this issue, as

students who feel emotionally and intellectually engaged are more likely to benefit from the debriefing process (Williams & Brown, 2020). Thus, fostering engagement goes hand in hand with creating psychological safety.

Lastly, the study revealed that while institutional support plays a vital role in sustaining these processes, the lack of direct influence on other factors may reflect an area of improvement. More research could be needed to explore how institutions can more effectively bridge the gap between policy and practice, ensuring that educators have the tools and environment necessary for success.

RECOMMENDATION

Re-evaluate and Expand Educator Training Programs: While educator preparation is often focused on clinical expertise, there should be a much stronger emphasis on training educators in debriefing techniques. This includes both pedagogical skills and emotional intelligence, as the debriefing process requires educators to not only assess students' clinical abilities but also their psychological state and emotional responses to the simulation. According to Roberts (2022), training programs should incorporate strategies for managing challenging situations, delivering constructive feedback, and creating psychologically safe spaces for students to engage.

Increase Institutional Investment in Simulation and Debriefing Resources: The critical role of institutional support should be more than just policy-driven. Nursing schools and healthcare institutions need to invest in state-of-the-art simulation equipment, but also in providing sufficient time and space for debriefing sessions to occur without the pressure of time constraints. As discussed by Lee et al. (2018), institutional policies should foster a culture where debriefing is seen as an integral part of the learning process, not just an afterthought. Additionally, financial resources should be allocated to ensure that both educators and students have access to continuous professional development opportunities.

Promote Psychological Safety as a Core Element of Nursing Education: Building on the study's finding that psychological safety is critical for successful debriefing, nursing schools should implement strategies to incorporate this concept into their teaching culture. Educational institutions must create an environment where students feel safe to express themselves and reflect on their experiences openly. This includes addressing power dynamics in the classroom and encouraging a non-judgmental approach to mistakes (Gordon et al., 2019). Faculty training should focus not only on teaching skills but also on fostering empathy and emotional safety during feedback sessions.

Foster a Holistic Approach to Learner Engagement: Learner engagement is critical to the effectiveness of debriefing sessions. Institutions and educators should not only focus on cognitive engagement but also on emotional and social engagement. It is essential to address the diverse learning styles and emotional needs of nursing students. This could involve incorporating innovative technologies, such as virtual simulations or interactive debriefing platforms, and ensuring that students are active participants in their learning process (Smith & Patel, 2020). Moreover, the study points out the importance of engaging students in the debriefing process through reflection, so educators should encourage more interactive and reflective learning opportunities.

Create Clear Pathways for Implementing Evidence-Based Practices: The findings from this study underscore the importance of creating a structured framework for debriefing practices. The ISM-based framework developed here offers a valuable tool, but more efforts should be directed at integrating evidence-based practices into the broader curriculum. Educational institutions should

encourage faculty to adopt and adapt frameworks like the one proposed in this study to ensure that debriefing practices are consistently evaluated and refined based on the latest evidence. This could include regular feedback from students and educators on debriefing quality and its outcomes, allowing for continuous improvement (Harris et al., 2019).

Encourage Collaborative Research and Feedback Loops: Finally, institutions should create opportunities for collaborative research and practice-sharing among educators. By encouraging collaboration across different institutions and fostering feedback loops between educators and students, the field of nursing education can continue to evolve and adapt to new challenges. Educators and researchers should regularly engage in discussions about what works and what doesn't, sharing insights on best practices and challenging assumptions about what constitutes effective debriefing (Chang & Lee, 2021).

This study serves as a call to action for both educators and institutions to rethink how debriefing is approached in nursing education. By placing a greater emphasis on educator preparation, psychological safety, and learner engagement, and by recognizing the critical role of institutional support, we can create more effective debriefing environments that ultimately improve learning outcomes. The proposed ISM-based hierarchical framework offers a roadmap for nursing educators to assess and refine their debriefing practices, ensuring that simulation-based learning continues to evolve as a key educational tool in nursing education.

LIMITATIONS

While this study does not involve expert validation, the framework is supported by a comprehensive literature base. The findings provide a systematic framework for nursing educators, enabling a structured approach to debriefing. The ISM model highlights the critical interdependencies among key factors, offering practical insights for educators and institutions to enhance debriefing quality. This study is limited by its literature-driven approach, future research should involve expert validation and empirical testing to refine and expand the proposed framework. Future research should incorporate empirical testing or expert input to refine the model.

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