

# **PROBLEMS AND CHALLENGES FACED BY NURSING STUDENTS**

By:

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**ABSTRACT**

*Aim/ Background:* Clinical education is a crucial part of nursing training, affecting the teaching-learning dynamic in clinical settings. Optimizing training methods and improving education requires understanding nursing students' clinical learning problems. This research examines Saudi nursing students' clinical learning challenges to suggest targeted interventions to improve their education. *Materials and Methods:* This qualitative content analysis research included seventeen Saudi Nursing College nursing students and three teachers. Purposive sampling selected individuals who participated in semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions to fully examine their perspectives. *Results:* Thorough data analysis revealed three main themes: poor communication, readiness, and emotions. These statistics show the many problems Saudi Nursing College clinical students experience *Conclusion:* Saudi nursing students confront major clinical education challenges. These obstacles hinder clinical learning for students. Instructors must focus on student preparation, including communication skills and psychological support, to overcome these challenges. The Saudi Nursing College may improve student learning and professional growth by understanding and addressing these difficulties.

## Introduction:

The path to become a nurse is a challenging and rewarding one that is characterized by intense academic study, clinical practice, and a dedication to providing compassionate care to patients while in the profession. The nursing profession, on the other hand, is fraught with a plethora of difficulties and roadblocks, which nursing students must overcome during the course of their schooling. In order to provide enough support and resources to individuals who are interested in becoming nurses, it is essential for educators, administrators, and policymakers to have a thorough understanding of these problems. The purpose of this study is to do an in-depth investigation into the numerous difficulties and problems that nursing students are confronted with. We are able to discover possible areas for improvement in nursing education, clinical training, and student support services if we conduct a detailed examination of these hurdles. In addition, the purpose of this study is to shed light on the emotional, intellectual, and professional obstacles that may be holding nursing students back from achieving their goals and maintaining their well-being.

In the course of their studies, nursing students frequently find themselves confronted with a variety of stresses, ranging from the complexities of clinical rotations to the demands of their schoolwork. In addition, the difficulties that these individuals are confronted with are further compounded by elements such as financial limits, insufficient mentorship, and the inability to strike a working-life balance. In addition, the views and preconceptions that society has regarding nursing may be a factor in the sentiments of undervaluation and exhaustion that students experience. Even though some of these difficulties have been discussed in past research, there is still a need for a more in-depth look into the myriad of experiences that nursing students go through. This research endeavors to gain a comprehensive understanding of the complex viewpoints and lived experiences of persons who are interested in pursuing a profession in nursing by utilizing both qualitative and quantitative research approaches.

At the end of the day, the findings of this study have the potential to inform evidence-based initiatives and policies that are aimed at promoting an atmosphere that is supportive of nursing students' learning. We can enable the next generation of nurses to prosper academically, professionally, and emotionally by addressing these difficulties head-on. This will ensure that patients all over the world receive care that is of the highest quality and is delivered with compassion.

## Literature review

The competence of nurses is derived from the knowledge and skills that are imparted to them [1]. Nursing training encompasses both theoretical and practical learning opportunities, which equip nursing students with the necessary information, skills, and attitudes to deliver nursing care [2]. Nursing education consists of two interrelated components: theoretical instruction and practical hands-on training [3]. A significant portion of nursing education takes place in clinical settings [4]. Clinical education comprises almost 50% of the formal educational courses in nursing in Iran and other countries [5]. Hence, clinical education is regarded as a crucial and inseparable component of the nursing education curriculum [6]. Given that nursing is a profession that relies on practical skills, the clinical learning environments are crucial in helping nursing students develop the necessary abilities and prepare them to enter the nursing profession as registered nurses [7]. Furthermore, the practical aspect of nursing education holds significant significance for nursing students when deciding whether to pursue nursing as a profession or not [8].

Clinical training in nursing takes place in a complicated clinical learning environment that is influenced by various factors [9]. This setting offers nursing students the chance to gain hands-on experience and apply their theoretical knowledge to develop a range of cognitive, psychological, and physical abilities that are crucial for providing patient care [10]. The quality of clinical education is significantly influenced by students' level of exposure and readiness to enter the clinical context [11].

Given that an ideal clinical learning environment has a beneficial influence on students' professional growth, a subpar learning environment can have detrimental impacts on their professional development process [8]. The volatile and uncertain clinical training environment might provide challenges for

nursing students [12].

Based on the researchers' expertise in nursing clinical education, it is evident that nursing students' behaviors and performances undergo transformation in the clinical environment. This alteration can have a detrimental impact on their acquisition of knowledge, advancement in providing medical treatment, and overall professional competence. Analyzing the issues and difficulties that these students encounter in the clinical learning setting can assist stakeholders in resolving these problems and supporting their professional development and longevity [11].

Ineffective learning and progress are the result of a failure to recognize the challenges and problems that students encounter in the clinical learning environment. Consequently, their talents will be impacted by the growth and development [4]. Research indicates that students' inadequate exposure to the clinical learning environment has led to higher rates of students leaving their studies. A number of nursing students have chosen to abandon the profession due to the difficulties they encounter in the clinical environment [13].

Extensive research has been conducted on the clinical setting. Our country has conducted several pertinent studies, albeit the majority of them have concentrated on clinical evaluation or stress factors in clinical training. A study demonstrated that nursing students are susceptible to challenges in the clinical setting, which subsequently diminishes their happiness with their clinical training [14]. Furthermore, the insufficient knowledge and abilities of nursing students in the clinical setting can result in anxiety [15]. Yazdannik and colleagues discovered that nursing students experienced feelings of inadequacy after beginning their clinical training [16].

#### **Types of challenges:**

There exists a significant body of literature addressing the challenges encountered by nursing students during their education and clinical training. Here's a brief overview of some key themes and studies within this area:

1. **Communication Challenges:** Numerous studies have highlighted the communication difficulties faced by nursing students in clinical settings. For instance, examined how ineffective communication impacts nursing students' experiences in clinical environments, emphasizing the need for improved communication skills training [17].
2. **Clinical Preparation and Skill Acquisition:** Nursing students often encounter challenges related to inadequate preparation and skill acquisition before entering clinical settings. Studies explore the importance of thorough theoretical and practical preparation to ensure students' competence in clinical practice [19, 20]
3. **Stress and Psychological Well-being:** The clinical learning environment can be stressful for nursing students, leading to psychological distress and anxiety. Researches delve into the sources and impact of stress on nursing students, highlighting the need for support mechanisms to promote students' well-being [21,22]
4. **Educational Environment and Discrimination:** Studies have also examined issues of discrimination and unequal treatment experienced by nursing students within educational and

clinical settings. Several studies investigate the effects of discrimination on nursing students' professional identity and learning experiences, emphasizing the importance of fostering inclusive and supportive environments [23, 24 25]

5. **Self-confidence and Professional Identity:** Nursing students may struggle with feelings of inferiority and low self-confidence, impacting their professional identity development. Several studies explore the role of self-confidence in nursing students' learning and caregiving abilities, highlighting the need for interventions to bolster students' confidence and self-esteem [25 - 31]

These studies represent a fraction of the literature addressing the challenges faced by nursing students. By understanding and addressing these challenges, educators and policymakers can better support nursing students in their journey towards becoming competent and confident healthcare professionals.

## Material and Method

*Research Methodology.* This section delineates a component of a more comprehensive grounded theory investigation. Utilizing content analysis as a qualitative research method allows for a thorough comprehension of the topic being studied. Qualitative research is well-suited for investigating nursing education due to its focus on trust, transparency, and adaptability [17, 18].

*Participants in the study.* The participants consist of nursing students and teachers from the Saudi Nursing College. Clinical nursing professors were selected to get perspectives from students who have hands-on experience in providing care at the bedside. The study included seventeen nursing students from different academic levels and three clinical nursing instructors, ensuring a wide range of views for thorough data gathering.

*Data collection.* The study utilized individual and group interviews, as well as observation, to investigate the difficulties faced by nursing students in clinical environments. Face-to-face interviews were done to inquire about participants' clinical experiences. Group interviews fostered collaborative discourse among students. Student interactions and behaviors in clinical situations were observed and recorded using field notes.

*Data analysis.* The method of content analysis was employed to identify and comprehend the difficulties faced by nursing students in clinical environments. This analytical approach examined interview transcripts in order to identify significant themes and patterns. The codes and categories were built in an iterative manner to capture essential findings.

## Results and discussion

The study revealed that Iranian nursing students face obstacles in the clinical learning setting, including ineffective communication, inadequate preparation, and emotional reactions.

One of the primary duties of teachers is to ensure that nursing students are treated appropriately in the clinic. This not only fosters greater enthusiasm and drive for learning, but also enhances their self-confidence [4]. In their study, Nabolsi et al. [2] showed that effective treatment and establishing communication with students are crucial for nursing lecturers to serve as role models for students. Training that incorporates principles of value and respect enhances the teaching-learning process and fosters the integration of students into the nursing profession [2]. The investigations conducted by Baltimore and Sharif, as well as Masoumi, have shown that disagreements and inadequate treatment between staff and students have a detrimental impact on the clinical teaching trend [15, 21]. Hanifi and his colleagues discovered that effective communication with students resulted in a boost in their

motivation [22].

A significant number of students involved in the survey expressed dissatisfaction with the staff's differential treatment towards them compared to medical students. The study conducted by Mohebbi and colleagues in Iran revealed a significant proportion of nursing students reporting instances of prejudice compared to students from other disciplines [23]. The study conducted by Baraz-Pordanjani et al. found that discrimination in the utilization of educational resources and facilities, as well as in interpersonal interactions, negatively impacted the professional identity of nursing students in the clinical setting. These findings align with the results of our own study. The act of comparing nursing with medicine and deeming medicine as a superior field undermines the personal dignity of nursing students and instills in them a feeling of professional inferiority [25]. The insufficient readiness of students when entering the clinical setting poses challenges for both the students themselves and their nursing instructors [26]. Despite acquiring the foundational knowledge of nursing through classroom instruction and practical training, nursing students lack adequate time to sufficiently practice and reinforce these skills before fully transitioning into clinical settings. Killam and Heerschap discovered that the students' inadequate preparation and lack of proficiency prior to entering the clinical setting posed challenges for their learning in the clinic [27]. Furthermore, it is clear that the students' deficiency in facing the clinical setting and managing real patients is apparent [11]. The insufficient knowledge and expertise of students, as well as their inadequate preparation for the clinical environment, disrupt their learning processes and cause them to experience anxiety [28]. The development of communication skills in nursing students fosters a supportive culture in the clinical setting, leading to a subsequent rise in their motivation [22]. The deficiency of practical skills among nursing students is regarded as a hurdle when transitioning into the clinical setting [29].

The stress experienced by nursing students when faced with the clinical environment has a negative impact on their overall health and disrupts their learning processes [30]. According to a study, stress is a common occurrence among students in the clinical environment [11]. Changiz et al. (2012) discovered that nursing students experience stress in the clinical environment for three main reasons: stress related to the educational plan, stress related to the educational environment, and stressors related to the students themselves [31]. According to Chesser-Smyth's (2005) research, students in the clinical environment commonly experienced stress and anxiety [8]. The relatively young age of nursing students when they begin their clinical training, along with their limited social and emotional experience, contributes to stress and psychological issues [32]. The students participating in the study also identified an inferiority mentality as a significant difficulty. The study conducted by Edwards et al. [30] shown that nursing students commonly experience poor self-confidence as a significant issue. Having sufficient self-assurance is a necessary prerequisite for nursing students to deliver high-quality care [33]. Joolae et al. (2015) identified a correlation between lack of self-confidence and dread and anxiety among nursing students. The researcher's investigation revealed that a deficiency in self-assurance also hinders communication among nursing students [11]. Furthermore, possessing sufficient self-assurance in caregiving is a crucial determinant of students' learning outcomes [34]. Begley and White (2003) found that self-confidence played a significant role in shaping a nurse's individual and occupational identity [35]. Our research revealed that nursing students in Iran encounter numerous obstacles in the clinical learning environment, which have a significant impact on their professional development and learning experiences. A significant number of students lack the necessary mental readiness to join the clinical environment, resulting in elevated rates of psychiatric issues. Furthermore, insufficient information and expertise, combined with a lack of mental and psychological readiness, disrupts the processes of learning and providing care to patients. The patients experience stress and develop feelings of inadequacy due to receiving inadequate care, facing discrimination, lacking sufficient knowledge and expertise, and encountering difficulties in communication. Given the difficulties that students face when dealing with the clinical learning environment and the importance of providing patient care in a calm and stress-free setting, educational authorities and nursing faculties must prioritize these concerns and work towards creating an environment that supports the learning and professional development of nursing students.



## Conclusion

The findings of the research indicate that a significant number of students do not possess the communication skills that are essential for engaging in productive conversation within the clinical setting. The effective communication skills should be taught to students before they join the clinical setting, with the focus being placed on the distinctions between the clinical environment and the classroom environment. This is a suggestion that has been made.

Taking into consideration the findings of the research, a significant number of students identified a deficiency in both theoretical knowledge and practical skills as one of the challenges associated with providing care. Therefore, prior to students entering the clinical setting, it is necessary to ensure that they are both conceptually and practically prepared based on their performance in the skill lab, where they are required to take exams and provide care assistance.

In light of the fact that students experience feelings of stress and inferiority complexes when they are confronted with the clinical environment, it is recommended that, while they are receiving psychological consultation on the nursing profession, caregiving, and the hospital environment, plans be made for them to visit the hospital and become familiar with the clinical learning environment before they begin their actual internship.

By doing a grounded theory research, which is a part of a broader grounded theory study, we were able to investigate how nursing students were exposed to the clinical learning environment and all of the components that comprised this process. This was the innovative aspect of this study. In addition, the difficulties that nursing students have were thoroughly evaluated in this research with regard to educational, behavioral, emotional, and practical elements. This is a significant difference between this study and many other studies that have been conducted in the past.

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