

The Role Of Nurse Educators In Bridging The Theory-Practice Gap

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Abstract

The disparity between education and clinical experience has continuously been a problem for educational specialists in the field. This essay seeks to examine the viewpoint of Iranian nursing professionals about the methodologies used for coordinating academic and clinical achievements in nursing. This research used a traditional content analysis technique to gather qualitative data. The study's findings were categorized into three primary areas: the creation of a curriculum based on the setting, fostering interactive cooperation between nurses and academics, and the development and execution of a standardized clinical guideline. To cross the gap among practice and theory, it is necessary to have a strong aim and active engagement from all recipients. Establishing a suitable environment for nurses as well as nursing trainers to engage in reciprocal learning, together with the use of practical language via clinical standards, may effectively reduce this disparity.

Keywords: Health profession, Nursing, Theory-practice gap, Nursing education, Clinical education.

1. Introduction

The notion of a disparity between theory and practice is not new. Nevertheless, despite several endeavors made by nurse faculty and clinicians to tackle the disparity between theory and practice, it continues to be a significant concern in both nursing education and practice. The intricate nature of the gap between theory and operation is not yet completely

comprehended. The ambiguity and varied interpretations of the theory-practice gap make its broad meaning uncertain (Scully, 2011).

Watkins, citing Chapman (2017), defines the theory and clinical gap as the disparity between idealized practice and actual practice, the discrepancy between general principles taught and the challenge of applying them to specific situations, the divergence between abstract nursing theory taught and its practical application, the disparity between scientific knowledge and theory commonly used in practice, and the contrast between our personal mental representations of nursing and the published theories of nursing.

The theory-practice gap is a persistent issue in nursing that affects both experienced and newly qualified nurses as well as students (Greenway et al., 2019). This gap can be defined as the disparity between the theories that practitioners believe guides their practice and the underlying theories that are actually embedded in their practice, which they may not be conscious of.

Matthew and Tucker (2018) highlight that when clinical practice deviates from using the most optimal scientific knowledge, it might lead to the provision of non-standard treatment for the patient. The lack of compatibility between theoretical education and the practical performance of nurses in clinical settings may result in the improper use of scientific resources, as well as a reliance on conventional traditional procedures in the clinic. This hinders the progress of theoretical sciences in nursing and might result in a decrease in the quality of nursing services. In fact, the gap between theory and practice has been recognized as a contributing factor to inefficient nursing practice and job turnover (Khodaei et al., 2016).

The connection between knowledge and practice is crucial for facilitating clinical decision-making and promoting the advancement of the nursing profession (Regaa et al., 2017). Nurses should possess knowledge of both the specific actions they are doing and the underlying rationale for those actions (Rolfe, 2013). The primary focus of nursing education is addressing the issue of how to effectively inspire students to acquire information and use it in clinical settings in the most effective and desired manner (Falk et al., 2016).

Nursing experts assert that the disparity between theory and practice not only diminishes the legitimacy of the nursing profession and the motivation of nurses, but may also result in a decline in the quality of patient care (Ajani and Moez, 2011). Various solutions, including internships, residencies, mentoring, and preceptorship programs, have been implemented in many countries to address this gap (Hosseini and Osuji, 2017; Wall et al., 2014; Valizadeh et al., 2016; Harris, 2014). While there have been instances when these programs have achieved some level of effectiveness, the topic remains a fundamental concern in nursing education that requires more investigation (Factor et al., 2017). The disparity between knowledge and practical application might lead to significant repercussions. Novice nurses are known to have emotional reactions that might impact their capacity to practice effectively (Massey et al., 2017).

Hence, it is important to narrow the divide between knowledge and application by providing training to nurses who can successfully use this information in their practice, enabling them to operate with efficiency and effectiveness in order to address the always evolving health requirements. There is a limited amount of research that specifically addresses the issue of connecting theoretical knowledge and practical application in the field of nursing, considering the viewpoints of both nursing educators and practitioners in clinical settings. This research aims to investigate the viewpoints of Iranian nursing specialists from both fields about their strategies for synchronizing nursing education and clinical performance. The objective is to address the gap between these two domains.

2. Context-Based Learning

Nursing textbooks are mostly authored in wealthy nations like America and Canada, even if they are used for teaching purposes in underdeveloped countries. There are few commonalities between these sorts of institutions, namely in terms of the technology and human resources accessible in the developed and developing nations. Farsi et al. (2010) claim that Iran, being a religious nation with a humanistic approach to care entrenched in the Iranian cultural background, conflicts with the prevailing theoretical/biomedical approach in the present nursing curriculum. Hence, it is crucial to modify the nursing education curriculum to align with the current setting. This reform should also be synchronized with any newly established philosophical and theoretical viewpoints on caring.

Trimmer et al. (2013) demonstrated that context-based learning may effectively bridge the gap between theory and practice. Based on the results of our research, it is necessary to establish a shared language between education and practice in order to close this divide. Furthermore, the findings of our research suggest that clinical recommendations are seen as the most effective means of promoting this information exchange. Jerlock et al. (2003) have also addressed this matter, asserting that clinical training in nursing plays a crucial role in connecting theoretical goals, practical application, and nursing research. Implementing clinical guidelines as an educational tool may help students develop practical expectations of the clinical setting.

In their 2015 study titled "The Connection Between Theory and Practice in the Initial Nursing Learning Experience," Fotheringham et al. highlight the importance of a nursing curriculum that clearly establishes the link between the fundamental aspects of nursing and practical application. By focusing on learning outcomes, such a curriculum can enable students to understand the role of theories in clinical practice.

The participants in our study expressed a strong recognition of the need to update the content of the nursing curriculum. This aligns with the interdisciplinary approach that forms the basis of the research undertaken by Ketcherside et al. (2017). The researchers found a notable disparity between the skills of nursing educators and nurses involved in their study. They concluded that while their findings cannot be applied universally, the interdisciplinary educational model, which emphasizes collaborative behaviors, can effectively implement interdisciplinary theory in real-world situations.

The findings of our present research suggest variations among participants in the practical use of particular clinical nursing theories. Some nursing instructors who were part of the faculty had negative views towards using clinical models. However, many published research have provided support for using theories as a means to bridge the gap between theory and practice (Baxter, 2007). Nevertheless, there is also data suggesting that the implementation of evidence-based procedures in clinical settings may not always provide beneficial outcomes (Sales et al., 2006).

Flood and Robinia (2014) suggested that university professors should provide clinical training to help connect the

gap between theoretical and practical training. A significant discovery from our research was the need for mutual and coordinated instruction of clinical nurses and academic instructors, which contradicts the prevailing assumptions within the healthcare community in Iran. Findings from prior research Studies conducted in Iran (Cheraghi et al., 2010) have shown a preference for vertical and hierarchical information and knowledge transfer from faculty to hospitals. However, the results of the present study indicate that this relationship can sometimes work in the opposite direction, with university educators also requiring training and empowerment from clinical nurses. When creating empowerment initiatives, educational development managers of faculties should consider this. The findings of this research indicate that policymakers should modify the procedure for completing continuous training programs and awarding certificates. This is necessary to guarantee that individuals maintain their competence and stay up-to-date with current practices.

Both nursing managers and academic educators in the study agreed that the preceptorship plan did not effectively connect theory and practice. They believed this was because the plan was not fully implemented, which they attributed to a lack of incentives for participation. As a result, nurses were unwilling to participate. According to Andrew and Ford (2013), it is important examining the function and position of clinical training facilitators as a strategy to bridge the gap between theory and practice. However, this assistance is not always sufficient (Andrew and Ford, 2013; Valizadeh et al., 2016).

3. Conclusion

To bridge the gap between theory and practice, it is necessary to have a strong purpose to change, along with active participation from both academic and clinical nurses. The results of our research indicate that establishing a suitable environment for nurses and nursing educators that promotes collaborative learning, together with the use of a standardized practical language in the form of clinical guidelines, might potentially reduce this disparity.

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