

## Cultural competence in nursing students

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**Abstract:** *Cultural competency is relevant to undergraduate nursing students in the US and developing countries. Service learning is thought to be a valid tool to familiarize nursing students with health disparities in developing countries and increase cultural competency skills that are applicable to cultural competence in the US and abroad. There is a need to conduct research studies using a convenience sample of nursing students participating in pre- and post- experience surveys and journaling activities. International service learning is thought to be a valuable teaching tool to increase culturally competent nursing skills. These skills are applicable in the US as well as abroad. Students demonstrated an increased score in their cultural competency assessment as well as established cultural competency and sensitivity as indicated by a qualitative analysis of journal entries. Results indicate that service learning is a valuable teaching tool for cultural competence.*

**Keywords:** *Cultural Competence, nursing, students, education, service learning*

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### I. Introduction

Cultural competence is a buzzword in today's healthcare. There are many factors that contribute to the increase in the interest of culturally competent healthcare in the United States (US). The US has an increasing minority population with 27.6% of the population representative of non-White citizens [1]. Annually, 83,000 deaths are attributed to racial and cultural disparities (2) with ethnic minorities representing this category of deaths. Research indicates that culturally competent care can mitigate health disparities and also shows that cultural competence can improve minority health by reducing health disparities, improving access to care, and improving quality of care [2, 3].

Nurses are one of the front line people in health care, and nurses can play a key role in providing culturally competent healthcare. However, research reports that nurses do not always provide culturally competent care [4]. Despite research supporting the use of culturally competent care, there are very few tools to assess cultural competence or teach cultural competence. The purpose of this paper to explore the science of culturally competent healthcare is to determine if international service learning is a valuable tool to teach culturally competent nursing care to undergraduate nursing students.

### II. Existing Model

Many research studies have qualitatively assessed the impact of international service learning on cultural competence. To discuss the research, it is important to have an understanding of what is meant by cultural competence and international service learning. Cultural competence is "a set of congruent behaviors, attitudes, and policies that come together in a system, agency, or among professionals that enables effective work in cross-cultural situations" [3]. This takes into account that culture is defined as the unified patterns of behavior that comprise the linguistic, feelings, traditions, philosophies, ideals, and establishments of ethnic, racial, social, or religious groups. Competence is defined as the ability to function within the framework of the cultural principles, actions, and requirements presented by those within the community.

An additional definition that requires defining is international service learning. International service learning is a "structured learning experience that combines community service with preparation and reflection" [5]. International service learning is designed to engage the student in service-learning as they provide the international community with service that meets their identified needs and concerns. Within the context of service learning internationally, students start to make connections between their service work, their chosen discipline, and their role as a global citizen.

A phenomenological study of 13 junior and senior nursing students at East Carolina University using pre- and post- interviews and reflective journals analyzed for the concepts of culture, communication, immigration, health, and community based on cultural immersion as it impacts a student nurses' cultural competence. The study yielded qualitative findings that included navigating daily life, broadening the lens, and making a difference. Students experienced a change in their perception of other people groups, and it was recommended that international service learning (ISL) opportunities must increase in nursing curricula, nursing programs must allow these programs to count towards clinical hours, and more research is needed to enumerate the total impact of ISL programs on cultural competence [6].

A descriptive study of 213 physical therapist program directors from schools in the US and Canada focused on the creation, distribution, and analysis of a questionnaire with data analysis consisting of frequencies and a Chi-square analysis comparing programs with ISL and without ISL. There were specific criteria identified as essential to physical therapy curricula because they increase cultural competence amongst students. Results found cross-cultural competency is the greatest advantage of incorporating ISL into educational curricula. Data analysis indicates that ISL programs increase the cultural competence amongst the students. Additional research needs to examine the benefits from students and communities served. Research should compare ISL programs with domestic service learning opportunities [7].

Faculty members from 87 US physical therapy schools completed a survey for a pilot study. This study was a descriptive, exploratory study using the grounded theory method. ISL experiences theoretically positively impact the students, and a conceptual model and definition should be developed to incorporate ISL into the curricula of physical therapy students. From this study, four themes of structure, reciprocity, relationship, and sustainability were identified. Based on these themes, a conceptual model and definition were developed. Students and the community are positively impacted by ISL. It was suggested that further studies should examine the service outcome measures and community benefits of the international and domestic community. Research should examine whether ISL programs should be implemented nationally.

Another study of 35 undergraduate nursing students at Auburn University was conducted regarding participation in an international service learning program in Quito, Ecuador. The study used a descriptive design and the Inventory for Assessing the Process for Cultural Competence among programs provided students with an opportunity to become culturally competent. The study indicated that 37.5% of students moved into the culturally competent category. The research study suggested the use of ISL and immersion-type experiences in the nursing curriculum to improve cultural competence amongst nursing students. Future recommendations include testing this model with another school [8].

In another study of 62 dental students at the Indiana University ISL program in Hidalgo, Mexico, students and faculty members were evaluated using evaluations and questionnaires, journals, and strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) analysis. The ISL programs allowed students to work directly with minorities that immigrate to the US to provide the student with an insight into the struggles of the minority populations they care for in the US. After the experience, students reported that they perceived they had a better understanding of the struggles of their minority patients. The study suggested that ISL program should continue to remain in the curricula, and curriculum should be studied to maximize the impact of the implementation [9].

An additional study evaluated the changing population of the US. The study was phenomenological in nature and focused on the changing population of the US as requiring culture awareness. The study identified a variety of factors that require nurses to be culturally aware and competent. It identified that cultural awareness should be assessed and taught to critical care nurses [4].

One study used a convenience sample of Hispanic American women to conduct a phenomenological study to understand Hispanic Americans' cultural perspective. It was identified as important to listen to the women. The voices of Hispanic American women provided insight into the cultural perspectives of Hispanic Americans. It was identified that implementation of training curriculum to provide insight into the Hispanic culture can guide the nurse to provide culturally competent care [10].

One study used 72 nursing students from UT Austin and the faculty members. The study was experimental in design, and it identified that nursing faculty shape the cultural awareness of nursing students. The study was statistically significant and identified a Cronbach's alpha of 0.82 indicating the applicability of the tool to other studies. The CAS can be used in other studies to identify student perceptions of faculty that may contribute to a lack of minority students enrolled in health professions [11].

One research study provided a background related to service learning. The descriptive study evaluated service learning programs and provided a brief history, indicating that service learning programs were implemented in the early 1990s. The study identified a means to teach community based education. It also identified service learning programs as possibly benefiting students. The study also identified that service learning programs should be implemented in health education programs [5].

Finally, a study evaluated 37 international students participating in a service learning program in Hong Kong. The study was a correlational and quantitative design. It also identified that service learning increases intercultural sensitivity. The Intercultural Development Inventory yields statistically significant results. Further research should focus on examining gender and socio-economic backgrounds of students [12].

### **III. Philosophical Underpinnings**

Thomas Kuhn is a philosopher that has applicability to the social sciences. Kuhn's philosophy discusses the nature of scientific revolutions and paradigm shifts. When related to cultural competence, a paradigm shift is crucial to changing how cultural competence is assessed and taught. When evaluating the improvement in cultural competence in undergraduate nursing students, it is imperative to understand what drives change when change occurs [4].

Kuhn discusses that in order to produce change, there has to be a crisis state in the current environment, otherwise known as the revolutionary period. During this revolutionary period, there is a realization that there has to be a change in the current environment. As the realization for a need to change increases, there is an openness that occurs. In the current healthcare arena, the environment is ripe for change, and it is within this period of time that a paradigm shift can occur thereby orchestrating a transformation in the way cultural competence is viewed and taught [4].

#### **IV. Theoretical Underpinnings**

Madeline Leininger's Culture Care Theory explores the complex interaction between health, well-being, illness, and death of individuals and patients so that healthcare providers may provide culturally competent care that is safe and meaningful to patients from a diverse cultural background [13]. In this research study, the international service learning experience allows undergraduate nursing students a chance to expand their worldview through firsthand experience with technological, religious and philosophical, kinship and social, cultural values, political and legal, economic, and educational factors as they provide care to individuals, families, groups and communities. As they experience these different factors and expand their worldview, this will shape their nursing care and professional care practices as they move towards culturally congruent care.

#### **V. Gaps in Nursing Science**

Assessing the gaps in the science of cultural competency and international service learning suggests that the biggest gap is in quantitative data to support the use of international service learning to teach cultural competence in undergraduate nursing students. There is also a lack of any type of research focusing on undergraduate nursing students and international service learning to teach cultural competence. Many research studies discussing the use of international service learning focus on other disciplines, such as dentistry, physical therapy, and medical students. There are several tools that are used in the research studies discussing the use of international service learning as a means to teach cultural competence. The most common tool is a reflective journal. Other studies use surveys like the Linguistic and Cultural Competency Self-Assessment, Assessment of Organizational Cultural Competence, the Self-Assessment for Cultural Competency, and the Cultural Competency Assessment Tool. These surveys are not specific to the nursing discipline.

When looking at how to best contribute to the science of cultural competence and international service learning, it is thought that the best way to contribute to this endeavor is to develop a cultural competence survey tool and conduct a mixed-methods study design using the survey and the qualitative journal. The current research studies support the use of international service learning through qualitative study designs, but the use of international service learning would be strongly supported through a quantitative study design.

The cultural competence survey will be developed with the use of the Cultural Awareness Scale, which is a 17 item, Likert-type tool as measured through 1=Never, 2=Sometimes, and 3=Always with a range of scores from 17 (lowest) to 51 (highest) at the 6<sup>th</sup> grade reading level. Participants will have approximately 15 minutes to complete the tool. The second tool is the Cultural Competence Scale that is a 25 item, Likert-type tool as measured through 1=Strongly agree, 2=Agree, 3=Neutral, 4=Disagree, and 5=Strongly Disagree at the 4<sup>th</sup> grade reading level, with the 10 minutes time to complete the scale.

#### **VI. Conclusion**

Cultural competence is an important topic in healthcare. There are some qualitative research studies supporting the use of international service learning as a means to improve cultural competence. There are several studies that focus on other disciplines, such as dental, medical, physical therapy, and physician assistant students. There is a need for studies that quantitatively examine the use of international service learning to teach cultural competence. Using the philosophical underpinnings of Thomas Kuhn and the theoretical framework of Madeline Leininger, a mixed-method study emphasizing the quantitative component of a study assessing the impact on cultural competence should be conducted to explore the merits of international service learning as an effective tool.

#### **VII. Recommendations**

1. There is a need to explore the impact of revolutionizing nursing education and using international service learning as a tool to teach nursing students.
2. Service learning may be used as a tool to teach cultural competence.
3. It is important to look at the measurable impact of international service learning on cultural competence in nursing students.
4. Nursing faculty members may play an important role in purposefully designing the nursing curriculum to include service learning opportunities.

**Further research recommendations:**

- A mixed-methods study should be conducted to evaluate the effectiveness further.
- It is recommended that this should be further evaluated in a quantitative manner.

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