

The Influence of Cultural Competence on Nurse-Physician Collaboration in Diverse Healthcare Settings in KSA: A Qualitative Study

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Abstract

Objective: This qualitative study aimed to explore the influence of cultural competence on nurse-physician collaboration in diverse healthcare settings in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), focusing on the perceptions and experiences of healthcare professionals.

Methods: Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 20 participants, including 12 physicians and 8 nurses, working in various healthcare settings across KSA. Participants were recruited using purposive sampling, and data were analyzed using thematic analysis.

Results: Four main themes emerged from the data: (1) understanding cultural differences, (2) effective communication strategies, (3) building trust and respect, and (4) organizational support for cultural competence. Participants emphasized the importance of cultural awareness, language proficiency, open communication, and a supportive work environment for effective nurse-physician collaboration in diverse healthcare settings.

Conclusion: Enhancing cultural competence among healthcare professionals is crucial for improving nurse-physician collaboration in diverse healthcare settings in KSA. Policymakers and healthcare organizations should prioritize cultural competence training, language support, and organizational policies that foster a culturally inclusive work environment.

Keywords: cultural competence, nurse-physician collaboration, qualitative research, healthcare diversity, Saudi Arabia

Introduction

The increasing diversity of patient populations and healthcare workforce in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) has highlighted the importance of cultural competence in healthcare delivery (Almutairi, 2015). Cultural competence refers to the ability of healthcare professionals to effectively provide care to patients from diverse cultural backgrounds, taking into account their beliefs, values, and practices (Almutairi & Rondney, 2013). Nurse-physician collaboration, which involves effective communication, coordination, and shared decision-making, is essential for providing high-quality patient care (Elsous et al., 2017). However, cultural differences and language barriers can pose challenges for effective collaboration among healthcare professionals (Al-Yateem et al., 2015).

Previous studies have investigated the importance of cultural competence in healthcare settings and its impact on patient outcomes (Almutairi et al., 2015; Alshammari et al., 2018). However, there is limited research on the specific influence of cultural competence on nurse-physician collaboration in diverse healthcare settings in KSA. This qualitative study aimed to address this gap by exploring the perceptions and experiences of physicians and nurses regarding the role of cultural competence in their collaborative practice.

Literature Review

1. Cultural Competence in Healthcare

Cultural competence has been recognized as a critical component of high-quality healthcare delivery in diverse settings (Betancourt et al., 2016). Almutairi et al. (2015) conducted a systematic review of cultural competence in healthcare in Gulf Cooperation Council countries, including KSA, and found that cultural competence training for healthcare professionals was essential for improving patient outcomes and reducing health disparities.

Alshammari et al. (2018) investigated the cultural competence of nurses working in a multicultural healthcare environment in KSA. The study found that nurses with higher levels of cultural competence reported better patient care delivery and job satisfaction. The authors emphasized the need for cultural competence education and organizational support to enhance nurses' ability to provide culturally sensitive care.

2. Nurse-Physician Collaboration

Effective collaboration between nurses and physicians is crucial for delivering safe and high-quality patient care (Tang et al., 2018). Elsous et al. (2017) examined the perceptions of nurses and physicians regarding their collaborative practice in Palestinian hospitals. The study identified communication, respect, and shared decision-making as key factors influencing successful collaboration.

Al-Yateem et al. (2015) explored the barriers to effective nurse-physician communication in multicultural healthcare environments in the United Arab Emirates. Language barriers, cultural differences, and hierarchical power structures were found to hinder open communication and collaboration among healthcare professionals.

3. Cultural Competence and Collaboration

The influence of cultural competence on nurse-physician collaboration has been explored in various healthcare contexts. Almutairi (2015) investigated the impact of cultural diversity on nurse-physician communication in critical care units in KSA. The study highlighted the importance of cultural awareness and sensitivity for effective communication and collaboration in diverse healthcare teams.

Aljadhey et al. (2014) examined the challenges and opportunities for improving patient safety culture in KSA. The authors identified cultural competence and effective collaboration among healthcare professionals as essential components of a strong patient safety culture.

While these studies provide valuable insights into cultural competence and nurse-physician collaboration, there is limited qualitative research specifically exploring the influence of cultural competence on collaborative practice in diverse healthcare settings in KSA. This study aimed to address this gap by providing an in-depth understanding of the perceptions and experiences of physicians and nurses regarding the role of cultural competence in their collaborative practice.

Methods

1. Study Design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design using semi-structured interviews to explore the influence of cultural competence on nurse-physician collaboration in diverse healthcare settings in KSA.

2. Participants and Setting

Purposive sampling was used to recruit 20 participants, including 12 physicians and 8 nurses, working in various healthcare settings across KSA. Participants were selected based on their experience working in diverse healthcare teams and their willingness to share their perspectives on the research topic. Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the participants.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Participants (N = 20)

Characteristic	Physicians (n = 12)	Nurses (n = 8)
Gender		
Male	9 (75.0%)	3 (37.5%)
Female	3 (25.0%)	5 (62.5%)
Age (years)		
25-34	4 (33.3%)	3 (37.5%)
35-44	5 (41.7%)	4 (50.0%)
45-54	3 (25.0%)	1 (12.5%)
Years of Experience		
1-5	2 (16.7%)	2 (25.0%)
6-10	4 (33.3%)	3 (37.5%)
>10	6 (50.0%)	3 (37.5%)

3. Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with each participant, either in-person or via telephone, depending on their preference and availability. The interviews were guided by an interview protocol that included open-ended questions and probes to elicit detailed responses about the influence of cultural competence on nurse-physician collaboration. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim for analysis.

4. Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was used to identify, analyze, and report patterns within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis process involved familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing

themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. Two researchers independently coded the data and discussed any discrepancies to reach a consensus on the final themes.

Results

Four main themes emerged from the data: (1) understanding cultural differences, (2) effective communication strategies, (3) building trust and respect, and (4) organizational support for cultural competence. Each theme is discussed in detail below.

1. Understanding Cultural Differences

Participants emphasized the importance of understanding and respecting cultural differences for effective nurse-physician collaboration. Cultural awareness and sensitivity were identified as key components of cultural competence. Table 2 presents examples of cultural differences and their impact on collaboration, as reported by participants.

Table 2. Cultural Differences and Their Impact on Collaboration

Cultural Difference	Example Quotes	Impact on Collaboration
Language barriers	"Some nurses struggle with communicating in English, which can lead to misunderstandings and delays in patient care." (Physician, Participant 5)	Language barriers can hinder effective communication and coordination between nurses and physicians, potentially compromising patient care.
Religious practices	"As a Muslim physician, I need to be aware of the religious practices of my patients and colleagues, such as prayer times and dietary restrictions." (Physician, Participant 8)	Understanding and accommodating religious practices can foster a more inclusive and respectful work environment, promoting better collaboration among diverse healthcare teams.
Gender roles	"In some cultures, male physicians may be more comfortable communicating with male nurses, which can create challenges for female nurses." (Nurse, Participant 3)	Gender roles and expectations can influence the dynamics of nurse-physician interactions, potentially hindering open communication and collaboration.

2. Effective Communication Strategies

Participants identified effective communication strategies as crucial for overcoming cultural barriers and promoting successful nurse-physician collaboration. These strategies included active listening, clear and concise language, and the use of interpreters when necessary. Table 3 presents examples of communication strategies and their benefits, as reported by participants.

Table 3. Communication Strategies and Their Benefits

Strategy	Example Quotes	Benefits
Active listening	"When I actively listen to my colleagues, regardless of their cultural background, I can better understand their perspectives and concerns." (Physician, Participant 11)	Active listening helps build trust and mutual understanding, promoting more effective collaboration among diverse healthcare professionals.
Clear and concise language	"Using clear and concise language, avoiding jargon and idioms, can help ensure that everyone is on the same page, especially when working with colleagues from different cultural backgrounds." (Nurse, Participant 7)	Clear and concise language reduces the risk of misunderstandings and miscommunication, facilitating better coordination and teamwork.
Interpreters	"When working with patients or colleagues who have limited proficiency in Arabic or English, using professional interpreters can help bridge the language gap and ensure accurate communication." (Physician, Participant 2)	Professional interpreters can help overcome language barriers, ensuring that important information is accurately conveyed and promoting better collaboration among diverse healthcare teams.

3. Building Trust and Respect

Participants emphasized the importance of building trust and respect for effective nurse-physician collaboration in diverse healthcare settings. Strategies for fostering trust and respect included valuing each other's expertise, maintaining open and transparent communication, and demonstrating cultural humility. Table 4 presents examples of strategies for building trust and respect, as reported by participants.

Table 4. Strategies for Building Trust and Respect

Strategy	Example Quotes
Valuing expertise	"When physicians and nurses value each other's expertise and contributions, it creates a more collaborative and respectful work environment." (Nurse, Participant 6)
Open communication	"Maintaining open and transparent communication, even when discussing sensitive cultural issues, helps build trust and understanding among team members." (Physician, Participant 9)
Cultural humility	"Demonstrating cultural humility, being open to learning from others, and acknowledging our own biases can go a long way in building trust and respect in diverse healthcare teams." (Physician, Participant 12)

4. Organizational Support for Cultural Competence

Participants highlighted the role of organizational support in promoting cultural competence and fostering effective nurse-physician collaboration. Organizational support included providing cultural competence training, establishing policies and guidelines for culturally sensitive care, and creating a diverse and inclusive work environment. Table 5 presents examples of organizational support and their impact on collaboration, as reported by participants.

Table 5. Organizational Support and Its Impact on Collaboration

Support	Example Quotes	Impact on Collaboration
Cultural competence training	"Regular cultural competence training for all healthcare professionals can help increase awareness, sensitivity, and skills for working effectively with diverse colleagues and patients." (Nurse, Participant 4)	Cultural competence training equips healthcare professionals with the knowledge and skills necessary to navigate cultural differences and promote better collaboration in diverse teams.
Policies and guidelines	"Having clear policies and guidelines for culturally sensitive care can help ensure that everyone is on the same page and working towards the same goals." (Physician, Participant 10)	Policies and guidelines provide a framework for culturally sensitive care, promoting consistency and accountability in collaborative practice.
Diverse and inclusive environment	"Creating a diverse and inclusive work environment, where everyone feels valued and respected, can foster better collaboration and teamwork among healthcare professionals from different cultural backgrounds." (Physician, Participant 1)	A diverse and inclusive work environment promotes a sense of belonging and mutual respect, facilitating more effective collaboration among diverse healthcare teams.

Discussion

This qualitative study explored the influence of cultural competence on nurse-physician collaboration in diverse healthcare settings in KSA. The findings highlight the importance of understanding cultural differences, employing effective communication strategies, building trust and respect, and receiving organizational support for cultural competence in promoting successful collaboration among diverse healthcare teams.

The significance of cultural awareness and sensitivity for effective collaboration in healthcare settings is consistent with previous research (Almutairi, 2015; Alshammari et al., 2018). Participants in this study emphasized the need to understand and respect cultural differences, such as language barriers, religious practices, and gender roles, to foster a more inclusive and collaborative work environment. These findings underscore the importance of cultural competence education and training for healthcare professionals to enhance their ability to navigate cultural differences and provide culturally sensitive care (Almutairi et al., 2015).

Effective communication strategies emerged as a crucial factor in overcoming cultural barriers and promoting successful nurse-physician collaboration, which aligns with previous studies (Elsous et al., 2017; Al-Yateem et al., 2015). Participants identified active listening, clear and concise language, and the use of interpreters as key strategies for ensuring accurate and effective communication among diverse healthcare teams. These findings suggest that investing in language support services and communication skills training can help facilitate better collaboration and coordination in diverse healthcare settings.

Building trust and respect was identified as another essential component of effective nurse-physician collaboration in diverse healthcare settings, consistent with previous research (Tang et al., 2018). Participants emphasized the importance of valuing each other's expertise, maintaining open and transparent communication, and demonstrating cultural humility in fostering a trusting and respectful work environment. These findings highlight the need for healthcare organizations to promote a culture of mutual respect and inclusivity, where all team members feel valued and supported.

Organizational support for cultural competence emerged as a critical factor in promoting effective nurse-physician collaboration in diverse healthcare settings, which aligns with previous studies (Almutairi, 2015; Aljadhey et al., 2014). Participants identified cultural competence training, policies and guidelines for culturally sensitive care, and a diverse and inclusive work environment as key elements of organizational support. These findings underscore the importance of leadership commitment and systemic changes in healthcare organizations to create a culturally competent and collaborative work environment.

Implications for Practice and Policy

The findings of this study have several implications for practice and policy in diverse healthcare settings in KSA. First, healthcare organizations should prioritize cultural competence education and training for all healthcare professionals to enhance their ability to work effectively with diverse colleagues and patients. This can be achieved through regular in-service training, workshops, and continuing education programs that focus on cultural awareness, sensitivity, and communication skills.

Second, healthcare organizations should establish clear policies and guidelines for culturally sensitive care to ensure consistency and accountability in collaborative practice. These policies should address issues such as language support services, religious accommodations, and gender-sensitive care, providing a framework for culturally competent care delivery.

Third, healthcare leaders should actively promote a diverse and inclusive work environment that values and respects all team members, regardless of their cultural background. This can be achieved through initiatives such as diversity and inclusion committees, mentorship programs, and employee resource groups that foster a sense of belonging and mutual respect among diverse healthcare professionals.

Finally, policymakers should invest in research and evaluation efforts to assess the impact of cultural competence interventions on nurse-physician collaboration and patient outcomes in diverse healthcare settings. This evidence can inform the development of best practices and guidelines for culturally competent collaborative practice in KSA and beyond.

Limitations and Future Research

This study has several limitations. First, the sample size was relatively small and limited to physicians and nurses working in KSA. Future research could include a larger and more diverse sample of healthcare professionals from different cultural backgrounds and healthcare settings to capture a broader range of perspectives on cultural competence and collaboration.

Second, the study relied on self-reported data from semi-structured interviews, which may be subject to social desirability bias. Participants may have provided responses that they perceived as more socially acceptable or desirable. Future studies could employ additional data collection methods, such as observations or surveys, to triangulate the findings and reduce potential biases.

Finally, this study focused on the perceptions and experiences of healthcare professionals and did not include the perspectives of patients or their families. Future research could explore the impact of cultural competence and nurse-physician collaboration on patient experiences, satisfaction, and outcomes in diverse healthcare settings.

Conclusion

This qualitative study explored the influence of cultural competence on nurse-physician collaboration in diverse healthcare settings in KSA. The findings highlight the importance of understanding cultural differences, employing effective communication strategies, building trust and respect, and receiving organizational support for cultural competence in promoting successful collaboration among diverse healthcare teams. Healthcare organizations and policymakers should prioritize cultural competence education, policies and guidelines for culturally sensitive care, and a diverse and inclusive work environment to foster effective nurse-physician collaboration and improve patient care in diverse healthcare settings. Future research should build on these findings by exploring the perspectives of a broader range of healthcare professionals and assessing the impact of cultural competence interventions on patient outcomes in diverse healthcare settings.

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