

The Role of Transcultural Nursing in Improving Patient Safety: An Integrative Review of Cultural Competence in Healthcare Settings

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Abstract

Global concerns regarding patient safety are especially pertinent in today's highly multicultural healthcare environment. Communication, decision making, and treatment adherence are influenced by culture. Miscommunication, lack of compliance with treatment plans, and higher risks for adverse events occur when there are differences in language, belief systems regarding health and wellness, and health-related practices among patients and healthcare workers (Divi *et al.*, 2007; Flores, 2006; Schyve, 2007; Richardson *et al.*, 2019). The development of transcultural nursing rooted in cultural competence provides an effective framework to provide culturally congruent and patient-centered care to help meet the needs of this population (Campinha-Bacote, 2011; Purnell, 2013). This integrative review is intended to explore the current literature related to the impact of transcultural nursing on enhancing patient safety within a variety of healthcare settings. A comprehensive search of four major electronic databases (PubMed, CINAHL, Scopus, and Google Scholar) was performed utilizing keywords associated with transcultural nursing, patient safety, and diversity. Articles published from January 1, 2010 through December 31, 2025 were included in the search results. Twenty-two peer-reviewed articles that addressed all three components (transcultural nursing, patient safety, and diversity) were selected for analysis using thematic synthesis and critical appraisal. Results showed that having cultural competence significantly enhances communication, decreases medical errors, increases treatment adherence, improves patient satisfaction, and builds trust between patients and their healthcare providers (Beach *et al.*, 2005; Truong *et al.*, 2014; Jongen *et al.*, 2018; Kaihlanen *et al.*, 2019; Govere & Govere, 2016). Three broad categories were identified based on the findings: (a) barriers to communication; (b) beliefs and practices relative to health and wellness; (c) cultural competence training; and (d) the relationship between cultural competence and patient safety outcomes. Additionally, subcategories included organizational support for cultural competence initiatives and cultural competence training programs at the educational level (Douglas *et al.*, 2014; Seeleman *et al.*, 2015; Jeffreys, 2016). Based upon the findings of this study, it appears that transcultural nursing plays a crucial role in ensuring both quality care and patient safety. Therefore, integrating cultural competence into clinical practice and the educational system, as well as incorporating cultural competence into healthcare policy, will be important steps toward providing safe, equitable, high-quality healthcare services (Alizadeh & Chavan, 2016; Degrie *et al.*, 2017; Stubbe, 2020).

Keywords: Transcultural Nursing; Cultural Competence; Patient Safety; Culturally Congruent Care; Patient-Centered Care; Healthcare Diversity; Communication Barriers.

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INTRODUCTION

Healthcare quality has many dimensions; however, patient safety remains the most critical component of healthcare delivery. Despite advancements in technology and clinical care, preventable adverse events continue to occur globally, often due to nonclinical factors such as communication failures and cultural misunderstandings (Schyve, 2007; Richardson *et al.*, 2019).

As healthcare becomes increasingly globalized, patient populations become more culturally diverse.

Each patient brings unique beliefs, values, and expectations that influence how they perceive illness, communicate symptoms, and respond to treatment (Betancourt *et al.*, 2003; Saha *et al.*, 2008). These cultural differences may create barriers in the patient-provider relationship, leading to miscommunication, diagnostic errors, and nonadherence to treatment plans, ultimately compromising patient safety (Divi *et al.*, 2007; Flores, 2006).

Culturally congruent care, emphasized through transcultural nursing theory, promotes care aligned with

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patients' cultural values and practices. Cultural competence, a core element of transcultural nursing, refers to the ability of healthcare providers to understand and respond effectively to cultural differences in clinical practice (Campinha-Bacote, 2011; Purnell, 2013). It involves delivering care that is respectful, responsive, and tailored to patients' cultural needs.

Although the importance of cultural competence in patient safety is increasingly recognized, its integration into healthcare systems remains inconsistent. Many healthcare organizations prioritize technical skills over cultural awareness, highlighting the need to better understand the role of transcultural nursing in improving patient safety outcomes (Douglas *et al.*, 2014; Seeleman *et al.*, 2015).

Therefore, this integrative review aims to synthesize existing literature to examine the role of cultural competence in improving patient safety and to provide recommendations for integrating transcultural nursing into healthcare practice.

METHODOLOGY

The researchers used an integrated review approach utilizing Whittemore and Knafl's model which allows for the incorporation of various types of research into the analysis for a more inclusive look at the topic. The review process also adhered to the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA), thus providing both methodological rigor and transparency.

A systematic database search was completed across 4 electronic databases (PubMed, CINAHL,

Scopus and Google Scholar). The search took place during January 2010-March 2025. Search terms were combined using keywords and boolean operators (i.e., "Transcultural Nursing," "Cultural Competence", "Patient Safety" & "Healthcare Diversity").

Articles included in this review had to meet the following conditions: peer reviewed; authored between 2010-2025; written in English; addressed patient safety outcomes in relation to cultural competency in a health care environment. Articles that did not address patient safety in a direct manner (editorial/opinion type); were not written about health care environments; and/or could be removed prior to assessment based upon title and abstract reviews were excluded.

In addition to the initial 145 records identified through the automated search function, there were an additional 10 records identified through a manual search. After removing duplicate references, 120 titles/abstracts were available for preliminary screening. A total of 78 titles/abstracts were eliminated due to preliminary screening. A total of 42 full-length manuscripts were evaluated to assess their eligibility for inclusion into the review. Twenty-two studies ultimately were selected as meeting all inclusion criteria.

The extracted information contained study design, study location, variables examined, results/findings, and implications for patient safety. The methodological quality of each study was evaluated using two appraisal tools (CASP/JBI) and studies were classified as either High or Moderate Quality. The data collected was then synthesized using Thematic Synthesis to illustrate recurrent themes/patterns and relationships among the studies.

Table 1: Advanced Synthesis Oof Included Studies (N = 22)

Author (Year)	Country	Design	Sample/Setting	Key Variables	Main Findings	Implication to Patient Safety	Level of Evidence
Beach <i>et al.</i> , (2015)	USA	Systematic Review	Multi-setting	Cultural competence	Improves quality of care	Reduces disparities & errors	High
Truong <i>et al.</i> , (2014)	Global	Systematic Review	Healthcare systems	Training interventions	Improves provider competence	Enhances safe care delivery	High
Betanco urt <i>et al.</i> , (2016)	USA	Review	Hospitals	Cultural competence & equity	Improves healthcare equity	Reduces adverse events	High
Saha <i>et al.</i> , (2013)	USA	Review	Patients	Patientcentered care	Improves adherence	Enhances safety outcomes	High
Kaihlane n <i>et al.</i> , (2019)	Finland	Crosssectional	Nurses	Cultural competence	Associated with better communication	Reduces safety risks	Moderate
Jongen <i>et al.</i> , (2018)	Australia	Review	Workforce	Cultural training	Improves interaction	Improves safety	High
Richards on <i>et al.</i> , (2019)	USA	Cohort	Hospitals	Language barriers	Increased adverse events	Major safety threat	High
Flores (2012)	USA	Review	Pediatrics	Interpreter use	Reduces errors	Improves safety	High
Divi <i>et al.</i> , (2007)	USA	Observatio nal	Hospitals	Language proficiency	Higher error rates	Critical safety risk	Moderate

Author (Year)	Country	Design	Sample/Setting	Key Variables	Main Findings	Implication to Patient Safety	Level of Evidence
Schyve (2007)	USA	Review	Healthcare	Communication	Language = key safety factor	Reduces medical errors	High
Shen (2015)	China	Review	Nursing	Cultural models	Improves care delivery	Enhances safety	Moderate
Alizadeh & Chavan (2016)	Australia	Review	Healthcare	Cultural competence	Improves outcomes	Promotes safe care	High
Horvat <i>et al.</i> , (2014)	Australia	Systematic Review	Healthcare	Interventions	Improves quality	Safer care delivery	High
Degrie <i>et al.</i> , (2017)	Belgium	Crosssectional	Nurses	Cultural competence	Linked to satisfaction	Indirect safety improvement	Moderate
Papadopoulos (2006)	UK	Framework	Nursing	Cultural care	Improves outcomes	Supports safe care	Moderate
Douglas <i>et al.</i> , (2014)	USA	Guidelines	Nursing	Standards	Improves care delivery	Strengthens safety culture	High
Seeleman <i>et al.</i> , (2015)	Netherlands	Review	Education	Training programs	Improves competence	Improves patient safety	High
Stubbe (2020)	USA	Review	Mental health	Cultural competence	Builds trust	Reduces risks	High
Gallagher <i>et al.</i> , (2015)	UK	Review	Patient safety	Cultural factors	Affect error rates	Prevents adverse events	High
Campinha-Bacote (2011)	USA	Model	Nursing	Cultural competence model	Continuous process	Improves safety	High
Purnell (2013)	USA	Model	Healthcare	Cultural awareness	Enhances care	Reduces errors	High
Jeffreys (2016)	USA	Education	Nursing	Cultural training	Improves skills	Enhances patient safety	High

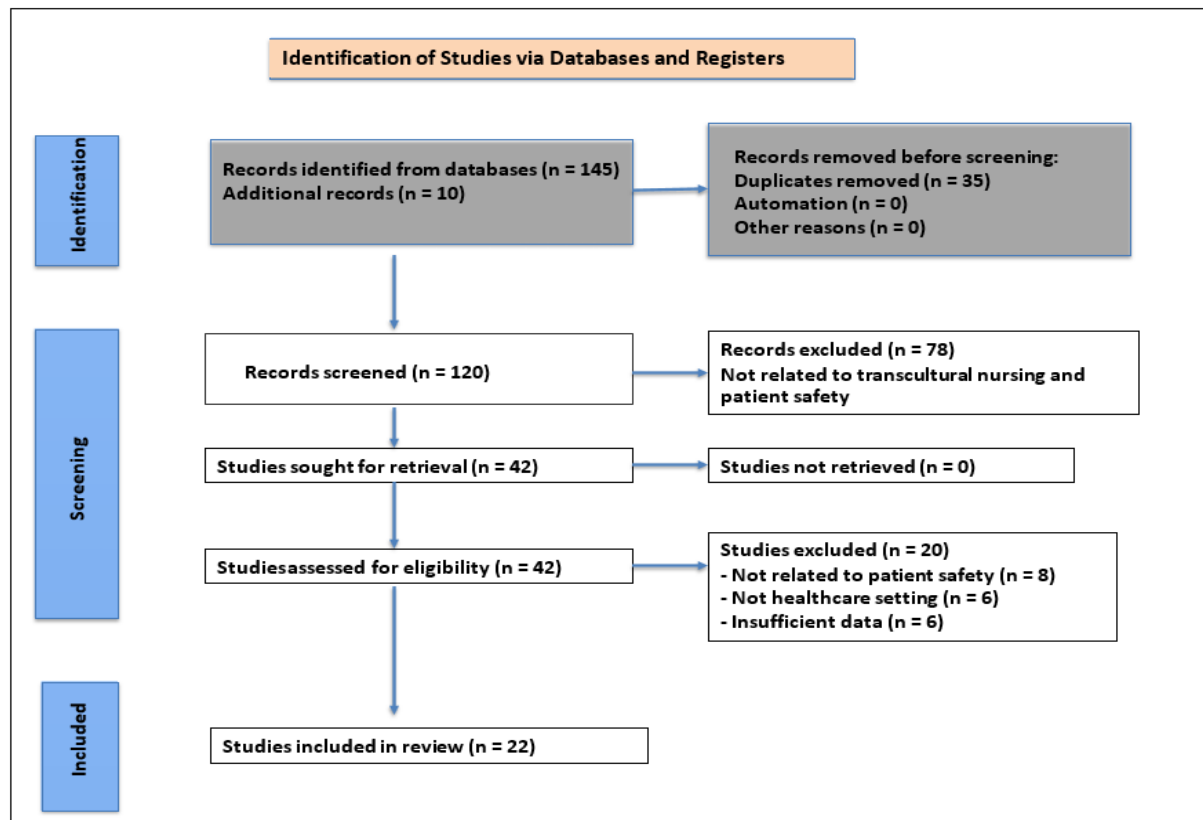


Figure 1: PRISMA Flow Diagram

RESULTS

Synthesis of Included Studies

Across the 22 studies reviewed, transcultural nursing demonstrated a significant positive impact on patient safety outcomes. The majority of studies reported direct improvements in safety, while others identified indirect benefits through enhanced communication, patient engagement, and trust (Beach *et al.*, 2005; Truong *et al.*, 2014).

Most studies included were systematic reviews and high-level evidence, reinforcing the strong association between cultural competence and improved healthcare outcomes. Cultural competence was consistently linked to better communication, which supports accurate clinical decisionmaking and reduces the likelihood of medical errors (Jongen *et al.*, 2018; Kaihlanen *et al.*, 2019).

Language barriers were identified as a major contributor to patient safety risks. Studies reported higher rates of adverse events among patients with limited language proficiency, while the use of professional interpreters significantly reduced these risks (Divi *et al.*, 2007; Flores, 2006; Richardson *et al.*, 2019).

Training programs aimed at improving cultural competence were found to be highly effective. These interventions enhanced healthcare providers' communication skills, cultural awareness, and ability to deliver patient-centered care, resulting in increased patient satisfaction and improved safety outcomes (Govere & Govere, 2016; Oikarainen *et al.*, 2019).

Thematic Findings

Communication Barriers and Patient Safety

Communication was identified as a critical factor influencing patient safety. Language discordance between patients and healthcare providers increases the risk of misinterpretation, misdiagnosis, and medication errors (Schyve, 2007; Richardson *et al.*, 2019).

Cultural Beliefs and Health Practices

Patients' cultural beliefs significantly influence healthcare decisions and treatment adherence. Failure to recognize these beliefs may lead to refusal of care or noncompliance, thereby increasing safety risks (Betancourt *et al.*, 2003; Saha *et al.*, 2008).

Cultural Competence Training

Educational interventions aimed at improving cultural competence were shown to enhance healthcare providers' skills, particularly in communication and clinical decision-making (Jeffreys, 2016; Kaihlanen *et al.*, 2019).

Impact on Patient Safety Outcomes

Evidence indicates that culturally competent care reduces medical errors, improves treatment adherence, and enhances patient satisfaction. These

outcomes are attributed to improved understanding between patients and providers and increased trust in healthcare relationships (Beach *et al.*, 2005; Degrie *et al.*, 2017).

Organizational Support and Policy

Healthcare organizations that support cultural competence through training, interpreter services, and inclusive policies demonstrate better patient safety outcomes. Leadership and institutional commitment play a crucial role in sustaining these improvements (Douglas *et al.*, 2014; Seeleman *et al.*, 2015).

DISCUSSION

The findings of this integrative review highlight that transcultural nursing is a critical component of patient safety in modern healthcare systems. Cultural competence significantly improves communication, strengthens patient-provider relationships, and reduces clinical errors (Truong *et al.*, 2014; Jongen *et al.*, 2018).

Patient safety is not solely dependent on technical proficiency but also on effective cross-cultural communication. Cultural competence bridges the gap between clinical knowledge and patient-centered care, leading to improved diagnosis, adherence, and overall health outcomes (Saha *et al.*, 2008; Alizadeh & Chavan, 2016).

Furthermore, transcultural nursing enhances relational aspects of care, including trust, satisfaction, and patient engagement, all of which are essential for safe healthcare delivery. Patients who feel understood and respected are more likely to share relevant information, adhere to treatment plans, and seek care promptly, thereby reducing potential harm (Degrie *et al.*, 2017; Stubbe, 2020).

Despite these benefits, challenges remain in implementing cultural competence in healthcare settings. Barriers such as limited resources, inadequate training, and lack of organizational support hinder effective integration. Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive approach involving education, policy development, and leadership commitment (Douglas *et al.*, 2014; Jeffreys, 2016).

Overall, integrating transcultural nursing into healthcare systems is essential for achieving safe, equitable, and high-quality care in increasingly diverse patient populations.

CONCLUSION

Transcultural nursing's value in patient safety relies on overcoming cultural and communication barriers. Cultural competence increases patient comprehension and compliance and also reduces medication and treatment errors, ensuring a higher level of patient safety and improved care delivery.

Transcultural nursing is crucial in practice as the health systems move forward in the culturally diverse environment and provides a means to ensure safe patient care and delivery.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Effective enhancement of patient safety through transcultural nursing necessitates a multilevel approach. At the clinical level, training and continuous education in cultural competence should be a part of the ongoing professional development for all healthcare providers to improve their communicative ability and delivery of culturally sensitive care.

Patients' cultural beliefs and practices should be included as an integral part of nursing interventions to increase compliance and outcome measures. At the organizational level, the implementation of culturally based programs that include mandatory training and provision of competent interpreters and culturally appropriate protocols should occur.

Healthcare administrators should be responsible to create a receptive environment in the hospital to facilitate and enhance effective and continuous improvement of patient safety behaviors and outcomes. At the educational level, transcultural nursing should be a component of all nursing curricula. At the policy level, health care systems need to develop and implement national policies recognizing cultural competence as standard practice; resources should be provided for culturally based training and research endeavors.

Future research should be directed towards multi-center studies to determine the nature of the relationship of cultural competence to patient safety and toward implementation research and investigation into the identification of culturally safe interventions and best practices.

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