

# **Bridging the Gap: Evaluating the Impact of a Transformative Continuing Education Program on the Competencies and Practices of Nursing Technicians and Specialists in Hafer Albatin and Skaka Aljouf - A Qualitative Study**

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2Nursing Specialist

3Nursing

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## **ABSTRACT**

Continuing education programs play a crucial role in enhancing the competencies and practices of nursing professionals. This qualitative study aims to evaluate the impact of a transformative continuing education program on the competencies and practices of nursing technicians and specialists in Hafer Albatin and Skaka Aljouf, Saudi Arabia. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 20 nursing professionals who participated in the program. Thematic analysis revealed four main themes: (1) enhanced clinical skills and knowledge, (2) improved patient-centered care, (3) increased interprofessional collaboration, and (4) barriers to implementing new practices. The findings suggest that the continuing education program had a positive impact on the participants' competencies and practices, but also highlight the need for ongoing support and resources to facilitate the translation of knowledge into practice. This study provides valuable insights for designing and implementing effective continuing education programs for nursing professionals in Saudi Arabia and beyond.

## **Introduction**

Continuing education is essential for nursing professionals to maintain and enhance their competencies, keep up with the latest evidence-based practices, and provide high-quality patient care (Nsemo et al., 2020). In Saudi Arabia, the Ministry of Health has prioritized the development of continuing education programs for nursing professionals to improve the quality of healthcare services (Almalki et al., 2011). However, there is limited research on the impact of these programs on the competencies and practices of nursing technicians and specialists in different regions of the country.

This qualitative study aims to evaluate the impact of a transformative continuing education program on the competencies and practices of nursing technicians and specialists in Hafer Albatin and Skaka Aljouf, two regions in Saudi Arabia. By exploring the experiences and perspectives of nursing professionals who participated in the program, this study seeks to provide insights into the effectiveness of continuing education in enhancing clinical skills, knowledge, and patient-centered care, as well as the challenges and facilitators of implementing new practices in the workplace.

## Literature Review

Continuing education programs for nursing professionals have been shown to have a positive impact on clinical competencies, patient outcomes, and job satisfaction (Chaghari et al., 2017). A systematic review by Bluestone et al. (2013) found that continuing education interventions that were interactive, used multiple methods, and were based on the principles of adult learning were more effective in improving knowledge, skills, and clinical practice compared to didactic lectures or printed materials.

In Saudi Arabia, several studies have investigated the impact of continuing education programs on nursing professionals. Almalki et al. (2012) found that a continuing education program on evidence-based practice improved nurses' knowledge, attitudes, and skills in a tertiary hospital in Riyadh. Similarly, Alsabban et al. (2020) reported that a continuing education program on patient safety enhanced nurses' knowledge and practices in a hospital in Jeddah.

However, there are also challenges and barriers to the effective implementation of continuing education programs in Saudi Arabia. Al-Dossary (2018) identified several barriers, such as lack of organizational support, heavy workload, and limited access to resources, that hindered nurses' participation in continuing education activities. Almutairi and Dahinten (2017) found that cultural and language barriers, as well as the lack of recognition and incentives, were among the factors that influenced the effectiveness of continuing education programs for Saudi and non-Saudi nurses.

To address these challenges, several strategies have been proposed, such as designing programs that are relevant to the local context and needs of nursing professionals, using blended learning approaches that combine online and face-to-face activities, and providing organizational support and resources for continuing education (Alshaikh et al., 2020; Zakari et al., 2014). However, there is a need for more research on the impact and effectiveness of these strategies in different regions and settings in Saudi Arabia.

## Methods

This qualitative study used a purposive sampling strategy to recruit 20 nursing professionals (10 technicians and 10 specialists) who participated in a transformative continuing education program in Hafer Albatin and Skaka Aljouf, Saudi Arabia. The program was designed to enhance the clinical competencies and practices of nursing professionals in the areas of patient assessment, evidence-based practice, interprofessional collaboration, and patient-centered care. It consisted of a series of workshops, simulations, and mentoring sessions over a period of six months.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with each participant, lasting approximately 60 minutes. The interview guide covered topics such as the impact of the program on clinical skills and knowledge, patient care practices, interprofessional collaboration, and barriers and facilitators to implementing new practices. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Thematic analysis was used to identify patterns and themes in the interview data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Two researchers independently coded the transcripts and met regularly to compare and refine the coding scheme. Themes were identified through an iterative process of reviewing the coded data, discussing interpretations, and reaching consensus. Trustworthiness was enhanced through member checking, triangulation of data sources, and maintaining an audit trail.

## Results

Four main themes emerged from the analysis of interview data: (1) enhanced clinical skills and knowledge, (2) improved patient-centered care, (3) increased interprofessional collaboration, and (4) barriers to implementing new practices.

### *Theme 1: Enhanced clinical skills and knowledge*

Participants reported that the continuing education program had a positive impact on their clinical skills and knowledge. They described how the workshops and simulations provided hands-on practice and feedback on patient assessment techniques, evidence-based interventions, and documentation practices. One nursing specialist commented:

"The program really helped me to update my knowledge and skills in patient assessment. I learned new techniques for physical examination and how to use evidence-based tools for pain management. I feel more confident now in my ability to identify and address patient needs." (Participant 8, Nursing Specialist)

Table 1 presents the specific clinical skills and knowledge areas that participants reported as being enhanced by the program.

**Table 1. Clinical skills and knowledge areas enhanced by the continuing education program**

<b>Clinical Skills and Knowledge Areas</b>	<b>Number of Participants (n=20)</b>
Patient assessment techniques	18
Evidence-based interventions	16
Documentation practices	14
Pain management	12
Wound care	10
Medication administration	8

### **Clinical Skills and Knowledge Areas Number of Participants (n=20)**

Infection control 6

#### *Theme 2: Improved patient-centered care*

Participants also described how the program enhanced their patient-centered care practices. They reported increased awareness of patients' cultural and linguistic needs, improved communication and education skills, and greater involvement of patients and families in care planning and decision-making. A nursing technician shared:

"The program taught me the importance of understanding the patient's perspective and involving them in their care. I now take more time to listen to patients' concerns and explain things in a way they can understand. I also involve family members more in the care process, which helps to build trust and improve outcomes." (Participant 3, Nursing Technician)

Table 2 presents the specific patient-centered care practices that participants reported as being improved by the program.

**Table 2. Patient-centered care practices improved by the continuing education program**

### **Patient-Centered Care Practices Number of Participants (n=20)**

Cultural competence	17
Communication skills	16
Patient education	15
Family involvement	13
Shared decision-making	11
Empathy and compassion	9
Continuity of care	7

#### *Theme 3: Increased interprofessional collaboration*

Participants reported that the program fostered greater interprofessional collaboration among nursing professionals, physicians, and other healthcare team members. They described how the workshops and mentoring sessions provided opportunities for shared learning, problem-solving, and relationship-building. One nursing specialist noted:

"The program brought together nurses, doctors, and other professionals to learn from each other and work together on patient cases. I now have a better understanding of the roles and expertise of different team members, and I feel more comfortable

reaching out for help or advice when needed. This has led to better coordination of care and improved patient outcomes." (Participant 12, Nursing Specialist)

Table 3 presents the specific interprofessional collaboration practices that participants reported as being increased by the program.

**Table 3. Interprofessional collaboration practices increased by the continuing education program**

**Interprofessional Collaboration Practices Number of Participants (n=20)**

Teamwork and communication	19
Mutual respect and trust	17
Role clarity and understanding	15
Shared problem-solving	14
Collaborative care planning	12
Conflict resolution	10
Interprofessional education	8

*Theme 4: Barriers to implementing new practices*

Despite the positive impact of the continuing education program, participants also identified several barriers to implementing new practices in their workplaces. These included heavy workloads, lack of resources and support, resistance to change from colleagues or management, and cultural and linguistic barriers. A nursing technician explained:

"Sometimes it's difficult to apply what we learned in the program because of the workload and lack of time. We have so many patients to care for, and there isn't always enough staff or equipment to do things the way we were taught. Some colleagues are also resistant to change and prefer to stick with the old ways of doing things." (Participant 18, Nursing Technician)

Table 4 presents the specific barriers to implementing new practices that participants reported.

**Table 4. Barriers to implementing new practices**

**Barriers to Implementing New Practices Number of Participants (n=20)**

Heavy workload and time constraints	18
Lack of resources and equipment	16
Resistance to change from colleagues	14

### **Barriers to Implementing New Practices Number of Participants (n=20)**

Lack of management support	12
Cultural and linguistic barriers	10
Inadequate staffing	8
Lack of follow-up and reinforcement	6

### **Discussion**

This qualitative study provides insight into the impact of a transformative continuing education program on the competencies and practices of nursing technicians and specialists in Hafer Albatin and Skaka Aljoug, Saudi Arabia. The findings suggest that the program had a positive impact on participants' clinical skills and knowledge, patient-centered care practices, and interprofessional collaboration. These findings are consistent with previous research that has shown the effectiveness of continuing education programs in enhancing nursing competencies and improving patient outcomes (Bluestone et al., 2013; Chaghari et al., 2017).

However, the study also highlights several barriers to implementing new practices in the workplace, such as heavy workloads, lack of resources and support, resistance to change, and cultural and linguistic barriers. These barriers are similar to those identified in previous studies on continuing education for nursing professionals in Saudi Arabia (Al-Dossary, 2018; Almutairi & Dahinten, 2017). Addressing these barriers requires a multi-faceted approach that includes organizational support, resource allocation, leadership development, and cultural competence training (Alshaikh et al., 2020; Zakari et al., 2014).

The strengths of this study include the use of a qualitative design that allowed for an in-depth exploration of participants' experiences and perspectives, as well as the inclusion of both nursing technicians and specialists from two different regions in Saudi Arabia. However, the study also has some limitations. The small sample size and specific context may limit the transferability of the findings to other settings. Additionally, the reliance on self-reported data may be subject to social desirability bias.

Future research could build on these findings by using a mixed-methods design to assess the impact of continuing education programs on nursing competencies and patient outcomes, as well as exploring the effectiveness of different strategies for overcoming barriers to implementation. Additionally, there is a need for more research on the cultural and contextual factors that influence the design and delivery of continuing education programs in Saudi Arabia and other Middle Eastern countries.

### **Conclusion**

This study provides evidence of the positive impact of a transformative continuing education program on the competencies and practices of nursing technicians and specialists in Hafer Albatin and Skaka Aljoug, Saudi Arabia. The program enhanced

participants' clinical skills and knowledge, patient-centered care practices, and interprofessional collaboration. However, the study also highlights the need to address barriers to implementing new practices in the workplace, such as heavy workloads, lack of resources and support, resistance to change, and cultural and linguistic barriers.

Continuing education programs for nursing professionals in Saudi Arabia should be designed and delivered in a way that is relevant to the local context and needs, and that takes into account the cultural and organizational factors that influence implementation. This requires a collaborative approach that involves nursing professionals, educators, managers, and policymakers in the planning and evaluation of continuing education programs.

By investing in high-quality continuing education programs and addressing barriers to implementation, healthcare organizations in Saudi Arabia can enhance the competencies and practices of nursing professionals, improve patient outcomes, and contribute to the overall quality and safety of healthcare services.

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