

## ASSESSMENT OF NURSES' KNOWLEDGE REGARDING THE THEORY-PRACTICE GAP IN HOSPITALS OF BAHAWALPUR

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### Abstract

**Background:** The failure to connect the knowledge gained through academic study and research with practical application is known as the theory-practice gap and is a well-documented global issue, which hinders the ability of nurses to apply academic knowledge effectively in clinical settings and leads to the various problems.

**Research Methodology:** 151 nurses who worked at the public and private hospitals in Bahawalpur, in the Punjab province of Pakistan, were the sample for this cross-sectional descriptive research study. A convenient sampling technique was used to choose the participants, and IBM SPSS Statistics 27.0.1 was used for analysis after a close ended questionnaire was used to gather data.

**Results:** Demographic data result of 151 nurses sampled include 86 female nurses (57.0 %) and 64 male nurses (43.0 %). The majority of respondents were aged 21-30 years (90.6 %), with a smaller proportion aged 31-40 years (8.6 %) and above. In terms of education, 19.2% were General Nurses (RN), 17.9 % were Post-RN, and 62.9 % were BSN-Generic. Regarding the awareness of the theory-practice gap, 90.1 % percent of nurses score greater than 80 % and 9.9 % score less than 50 %, its means that most of the participants fall in the excellent knowledge score. However 41.1% believed that the gap was fundamentally good, while 58.9% believed that the gap was fundamentally not good.

**Conclusion:** This study highlights the significant theory-practice gap that nurses

of public and private hospitals in Bahawalpur, encounter. The findings indicate that the primary causes of the gap are a lack of curriculum modifications, insufficient resources, and a lack of collaboration between clinical settings and training facilities. Despite the fact that most nurses are aware of the gap, there are differing views on its consequences and potential solutions.

## INTRODUCTION

The theory-practice gap is the disconnection between nursing education and its application in clinical practice (Tilden and Tilden 1985); (Meleis 2011) and is a well-documented global issue, which hinders the ability of nurses to apply academic knowledge effectively in clinical settings, thus impacting patient care quality and outcomes. It compromised patient care quality, increased safety risks, reduced job satisfaction, inefficient resources use and limit professional growth. In hospitals, such as those in Bahawalpur, nurses often face difficulties in translating classroom learning into practical application, leading to inconsistent patient care (Akram, Mohamad et al. 2018); (Hameed, Abdullahi et al. 2023). Despite advances in nursing education, this gap persists, undermining the quality of nursing performance and overall patient care (Abdullahi, Ghiyasvandian et al. 2022).

To improve their professional development and capacity to deliver high-quality care, nursing students must engage in clinical learning in order to close the gap between their theoretical knowledge and actual application. However, a lack of emphasis on evidence-based practice and a lack of practical experience make it difficult for many recently graduated nurses to apply their academic knowledge to clinical practice (Shahzadi, Kousar et al. 2017); (Salah, Aljerjawy et al. 2018). Furthermore, traditional, antiquated techniques are still widely used in clinical settings, which limits nursing science advancement and results in poor care. These difficulties still exist for both nursing students and recently licensed nurses, who encounter deficiencies in clinical proficiency and critical thinking (Greenway, Butt et al. 2019).

By examining the unique difficulties encountered by nurses in Bahawalpur, with a particular emphasis on the lack of integration between theoretical learning and clinical practice, this study seeks to close these gaps. (Singh, Alomari et al. 2024) The study will look at the systemic obstacles that lead to the theory-

practice gap, deficiencies in clinical training, and curriculum issues. By identifying these problems, the study will offer insightful analysis and suggestions to enhance nursing practice and education, which will eventually improve patient care and the professional growth of nurses in the area (Hameed, Abdullahi et al. 2023).

**Objective:** To determine the Level of Knowledge about theory-practice gap.

### Research Question:

What is the level of knowledge among nurses at hospitals of Bahawalpur regarding the theory-practice gap in nursing care?

### Problem Statement:

According to the researcher, nurses find it difficult to apply their academic knowledge in clinical settings, which results in inconsistent patient care. Nurses frequently prioritize finishing their coursework above gaining practical skills. The theory-practice gap is further widened by out-of-date curriculum, a lack of clinical mentorship, and little practical training, which has an impact on health care quality and professional development.

### Significance of study:

The importance of a nursing student's success in a clinical context is thoroughly explained by clinical learning. Additionally, it enables students to expand their knowledge, build their professional identities, and use their theoretical and practical abilities in a clinical situation. Given the increasing need for qualified nurses in the health care sectors, it is imperative to critically assess the readiness of recently graduated nurses for professional practice (Salah, Aljerjawy et al. 2018).

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The gap between nursing theory and practice is a well-known global issue that significantly affects health care delivery, particularly in nursing education. A mismatch arises when academic teaching fails to effectively translate theoretical knowledge into practical clinical abilities (Abdullahi, Ghiyasvandian et al. 2022);(Gassas and Ahmed 2022). The theory-practice divide has long been recognized as a barrier to delivering evidence-based care and achieving optimal patient outcomes (Benner, 1984; Meleis, 2011). According to recent studies, this disparity is caused by structural problems such as outdated curriculum, a lack of clinical mentor ship, and poor collaboration between medical facilities and academic institutions(Akram, Mohamad et al. 2018); (Hameed, Abdullahi et al. 2023)

Research from all around the world supports these conclusions. Salifu et al. (2019) and Mortell (2019), for instance, researchers from Ghana noted that nurses generally struggle to apply classroom knowledge in clinical settings, which raises error rates and jeopardizes patient care. Numerous significant issues, such as outdated curricula, inadequate clinical supervision, and a dearth of opportunities for hands-on training, have been blamed for this discrepancy (Blakeslee, 2020; Barrett & Oborn, 2018). The situation is made worse by systemic issues in Pakistan, such as the absence of official mentor ship programs and the lack of clinical teacher assistance (Hameed et al., 2023). Additionally, nurses with less practical experience—including those with bachelor's degrees—find it more challenging to bridge the theory-practice.

Recent studies have also looked at nurses' and nursing students' perspectives on this issue. For example, according to a study by Hameed et al. (2023), 89.06% of Pakistani nurses recognized the theory-practice gap as a significant issue. They cited several reasons for this, such as a lack of clinical exposure, outdated practices, and poor communication between academic staff and clinical instructors. According to Tanriverdi et al. (2017), Turkish nursing students identified improved skill-development opportunities, enhanced cooperation between academic institutions and clinical settings, and improved alignment between classroom

instruction and clinical practice as crucial strategies for bridging the gap.

## METHODOLOGY

The Cross-sectional descriptive study was conducted to provide a comprehensive snapshot of knowledge of staff nurses regarding the theory-practice gap in nursing at a view of a population at a specific moment. The study was carried out both in private and public sector hospitals of Bahawalpur over a two month period from January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2024 to March 1<sup>st</sup>, 2025. A non-probability, convenient sampling technique was used to select a sample of 151 staff nurses. Data were collected through a closed ended questionnaire adopted from (Hameed, Abdullahi et al. 2023). Written consent was obtained from the participants to assure them of anonymity and confidentiality throughout the research process. All participants were provided a written informed consent (attached). All information and data gathered was kept private. Throughout the study, participants remained anonymous. The volunteers were informed that there are no dangers or drawbacks to this research. Participants were notified that they can withdraw from the study at any moment during the research procedure. There were no known dangers linked with this study. Participation in this study was entirely optional. Participants have the option of not participating or withdrawing their agreement to participate at any moment. The participants were not kept in the dark about the study in any way. The primary variables studied were knowledge and theory-practice gap. Knowledge levels were assessed using structured questionnaire scores and categorized as Excellent (>80%), Good (80-65 %), Average (56-50 %), and Poor (<50 %). The collected data was analyzed using descriptive statistics with IBM SPSS Statistics 27.0.1.

## RESULTS

The results and interpretation of the data pertaining to the current investigation are explained in this chapter. The chapter also concentrates on two fundamental areas: demographics and knowledge regarding theory-practice gap in nursing. A self-structured questionnaire was used to gather information from 151 staff nurses of public and private hospitals in Bahawalpur.

**Demographics:**

The demographic results of 151 nurses sampled include 86 female nurses (57.0%) and 64 male nurses (43.0%). The majority of respondents were aged 21-30 years (90.6%), with a smaller proportion

aged 31-40 years (8.6%) and above. It means that most of the participants were in the young age. In terms of education, 19.2% were General Nurses (RN), 17.9% were Post-RN, and 62.9 % were BSN- Generic. (Table 4.1).

**Table 4.1: Demographic data of nurses working in public and private hospitals of bahawalpur, Pakistan (n=151)**

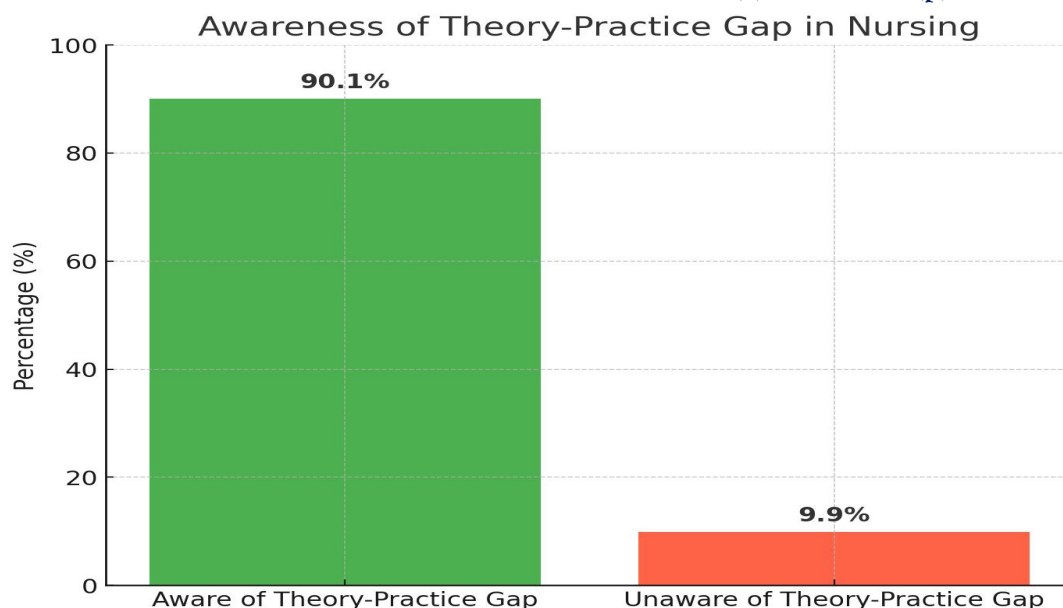
Variables	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Age (Years)</b>		
21-30	136	90.6
31-40	13	8.6
41-50	2	1.3
Above 50	00	00
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	65	43.0
Female	86	57.0
<b>Level Of Education</b>		
BSN-Generic	95	62.9
General Nurse (RN)	29	19.2
Post-RN	27	17.9

**Descriptive statistics, frequency, percentage.**

**Nurses' Knowledge Regarding Theory-Practice Gap:**

According to the survey results, the majority of nurses demonstrated a strong understanding of the difference between theoretical knowledge and practical application, with 90.1% of participants scoring above 80%, indicating an excellent grasp of the theory-practice gap in nursing. Meanwhile, 9.9%

of respondents scored below 50%, suggesting lower awareness of the gap. This data highlights the extent of knowledge among nurses regarding this issue. The findings suggest that while most nurses recognize the gap, there remains a small proportion with limited awareness. Further analysis is required to explore factors influencing these difference in knowledge levels. (Figure 4.2)



**Figure 4.2: Awareness of Theory-Practice Gap among nurses of Bahawalpur in nursing.**

Figure 4.3: Explores the perceived reasons behind the theory-practice gap in nursing. The majority of respondents (58.7%) identified a lack of collaboration between training institutions and clinical settings as the primary cause. Additionally, 26.6% cited insufficient funding and resources for infrastructure as a contributing factor. A significant portion (22.4%) believed that the absence of regular curriculum updates

plays a role, while 23.8% emphasized the importance of integrating evidence-based practice into patient care. Meanwhile, 13.3% of respondents selected the "others category, indicating disagreement with the theory-practice gap or suggesting alternative reasons. The results suggest that strengthening collaboration between academic and clinical settings should be prioritized as the primary intervention.

**Figure 4.3: Nurses' perceptions regarding causes of the theory-practice gap?**

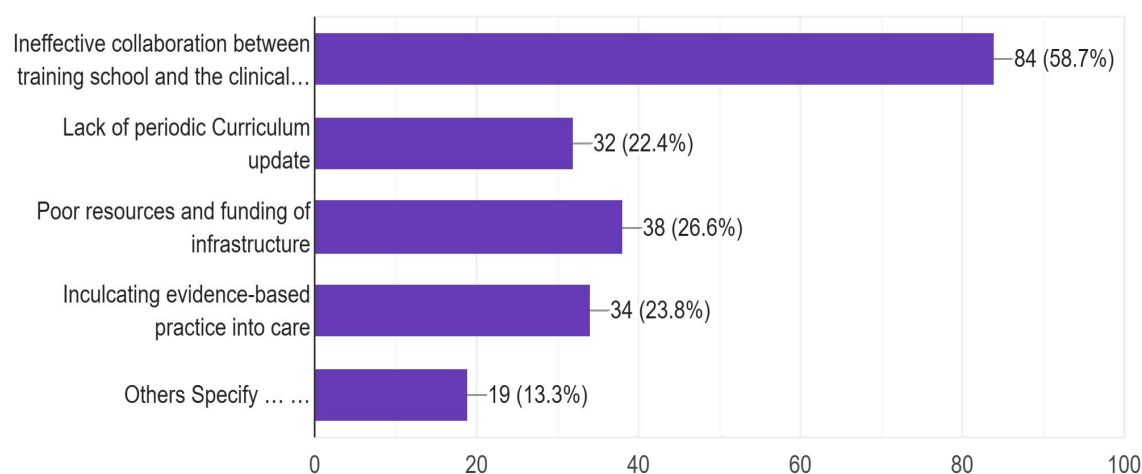
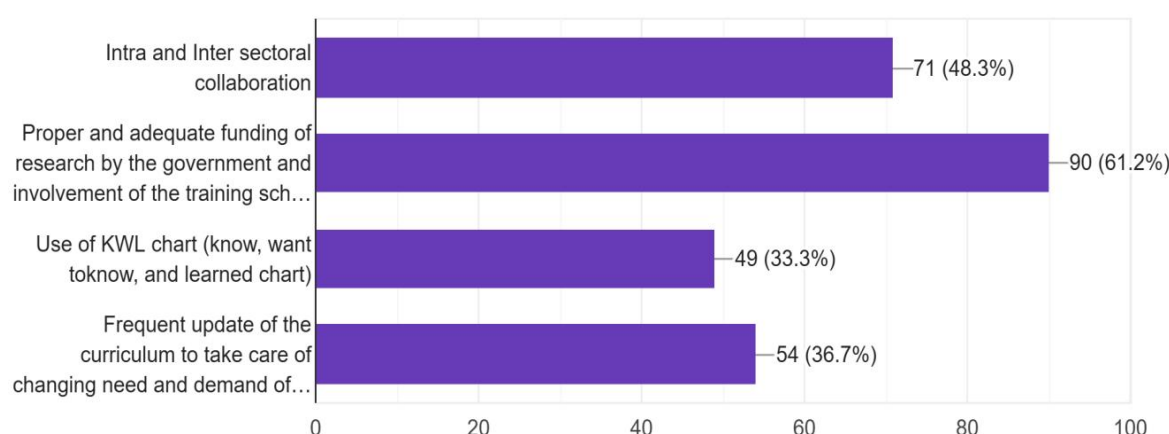


Figure 4.4: Illustrates the perceptions of respondents regarding strategies to bridge the theory-practice gap in nursing. Out of 151 participants, 61.2 % believe that the gap can be minimized by ensuring proper and adequate funding of research by the government and actively involving training schools in clinical practice. This highlights the importance of integrating academic institutions into the practical health care environment to enhance learning outcomes. Additionally, 48.3 % of respondents emphasize the significance of intra- and inter-sectoral collaboration, suggesting that improved coordination between training institutions and health care facilities could

foster a more seamless transition from theory to practice. Meanwhile, 36.7% support frequent curriculum updates to align nursing education with evolving health care demands. Surprisingly, only 33.3% favor the use of the KWL chart (Know, Wish to Know, and Learned), indicating that alternative learning strategies may be more effective in addressing the issue. These findings suggest that a multifaceted approach-comprising research funding collaboration, curriculum updates, and innovative teaching methodologies is essential to closing the theory-practice gap in nursing education.

**Figure 4.4: Knowledge question: How may the theory-practice gap be reduced, in your opinion?**



## DISCUSSION:

The findings of this study indicate that the majority of nurses are aware of the theory-practice gap, with 90.6% of participants acknowledging its existence, while only 9.4% either remained unaware or did not recognize its implication. This high level of awareness highlights the critical need for addressing the gap through educational reforms, improved collaboration between academic institutions and clinical settings, and the promotion of evidence-based practices. These results are consistent with the findings of (Hameed, Abdullahi et al. 2023), who reported that 89.09% of nurses recognized the gap, further confirming its widespread recognition among nursing professionals.

This study also revealed a significant correlation between nurses' age, educational attainment, and their level of awareness regarding the theory-practice

gap. More experienced and academically trained nurses demonstrated higher awareness, reinforcing the importance of clinical preceptor-ships and practical training in bridging the gap, as supported by research from the US and Ethiopia. However, the comparatively lower knowledge levels among bachelors degree holders in this study could be attributed to their limited involvement in clinical supervision, as they often rely on clinical instructors for hands-on training. This suggests that enhanced engagement in clinical practice during undergraduate education may improve their understanding.

Contrary to the findings of this study, which indicated varying degrees of awareness among nurses, (Abdullahi, Ghiyasvandian et al. 2022) reported that 83.8% of nurses had extensive knowledge of the theory-practice gap, with MSc holders demonstrating the highest awareness levels. This difference may be

due to regional variations in institutional support, clinical exposure, or educational structures. Furthermore, (Gassas and Ahmed 2022) identified organizational support and nurse-to-patient ratios as crucial factors influencing knowledge levels, reinforcing the necessity for institutional reforms to address the gap effectively.

According to Tanriverdi, Ozyazicioglu et al. (2017), the difficulties in translating theoretical knowledge into practice further validate the need for integrated academic-clinical models.

### CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study emphasizes how crucial coordinated interventions—like improved clinical training, institutional support, and cross-sector cooperation are to effectively bridging the theory-practice gap. By addressing these challenges, nursing practice and education can become more closely integrated, improving patient care outcomes and nurses' professional competence.

### LIMITATIONS

**1. Limited Sample Size** - The study was conducted on a relatively small sample, which may not fully represent the broader nursing population.

**2. Potential Response Bias** - Participants' responses may have been influenced by personal experiences, social desirability, or institutional affiliations.

**3. Contextual Limitations** - The results are specific to the Bahawalpur region and may not be fully applicable to other regions with different health care infrastructures.

**4. Lack of Longitudinal Data** - The study provides a snapshot of the issue but does not assess long term trends or changes in the theory-practice gap.

**5. Lack of Comparative Analysis** - The study does not compare findings across different hospitals, nursing schools, or provinces to identify broader patterns.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

➤ In the light of per-mentioned discussion, few suggestions are offered to enhance the skills and professional competence of nurses:-

**1.** Better collaboration between medical facilities and educational institutions to align theoretical knowledge with practical need.

**2.** Increased funding for research and infrastructure to support evidence-based practices.

**3.** To reflect the needs of contemporary health-care, the nursing curriculum is updated on a regular basis.

**4.** Making use of modern teaching tools, such KWL charts and mentor ship programs, to improve practical skills.

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