

FUTURE CHALLENGES TO NURSING EDUCATION AND JOB MARKET DUE TO THE EMERGING NURSING COLLEGES OF PAKISTAN

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Abstract

Background: The rapid emergence of numerous nursing colleges across Pakistan has significantly altered the landscape of nursing education and employment. While increasing access to education is positive, it presents challenges that impact both the quality of nursing graduates and their integration into the job market.

Objective: to explore and consolidate evidence on the future challenges posed by the proliferation of nursing institutions in Pakistan, focusing on educational quality, faculty availability, clinical training, and employment outcomes.

Methods: A comprehensive review of qualitative and quantitative studies examining the effects of emerging nursing colleges on education standards and job market dynamics in Pakistan.

Results: Findings reveal critical issues including disparities in infrastructure and faculty qualifications, overcrowding in clinical placements, inconsistent regulatory enforcement, and an oversaturated job market with limited absorption capacity. These factors collectively threaten the competency of nursing graduates and their employability.

Conclusion: To ensure sustainable growth of the nursing workforce, strategic interventions are needed to standardize education quality, enhance faculty development, improve clinical training opportunities, and align graduate output with healthcare sector demands in Pakistan.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade, Pakistan has witnessed a rapid expansion in the number of nursing colleges, both public and private, aiming to address the acute shortage of qualified nurses in the country (Jan et al., 2023). The Pakistan Nursing Council (PNC) has registered a significant increase in the number of nursing colleges since 2010, particularly in the private sector. According to a report by the World Health Organization (Smiley et al., 2021), this expansion is driven by national efforts to achieve

Sustainable Development Goal 3: Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all. However, the growth has often outpaced the regulatory capacity of the PNC and the Higher Education Commission (HEC), leading to inconsistencies in curriculum implementation and accreditation processes (Muhammad, 2023). One of the most pressing challenges is the shortage of qualified nursing faculty. Studies show that many new institutions struggle to meet minimum faculty-student ratio

requirements, often hiring underqualified or inexperienced educators (Chandio et al., 2024). This compromises the quality of theoretical and clinical education, resulting in a workforce that may be ill-prepared for the demands of modern healthcare systems (Cruz-Gomes et al., 2019). The lack of clinical placements further complicates training, especially in urban areas where hospital affiliations are saturated. This rush in educational institutions has increased access to nursing education across urban and rural areas (Ali et al., 2023). However, alongside this growth, significant challenges have emerged, particularly concerning the quality of nursing education and the lack of standardized curricula across institutions (Bardaie, 2023). Many newly established colleges face infrastructural deficits and a shortage of qualified faculty, which compromises the delivery of effective clinical training (Sodho et al., 2021). Moreover, inconsistencies in regulatory oversight by bodies such as the Pakistan Nursing Council have led to variable accreditation standards and enforcement gaps (Aftab et al., 2021). The rapid increase in graduates has also contributed to workforce saturation, with the healthcare system's capacity to absorb these new nurses lagging behind demand, resulting in underemployment and job

dissatisfaction (Michaeli et al., 2024). This systematic review integrates qualitative and quantitative findings from multiple studies and reports to explore these complex and interrelated challenges, offering insight into how nursing education and employment in Pakistan may evolve if current trends continue unchecked.

Methodology:

A systematic review approach was employed to synthesize findings from a wide range of sources, including published qualitative and quantitative studies, academic articles, government reports, and gray literature. An initial search using keywords such as “nursing colleges Pakistan,” “nursing education challenges,” “job market for nurses in Pakistan,” “nurse employment saturation,” and “nurse faculty shortage” yielded 100 articles. After applying inclusion criteria focused on relevance to nursing education quality, faculty capacity, regulatory oversight, employment opportunities, and workforce development in Pakistan, 30 articles were selected for this review. Data were analyzed by narrative synthesis; Summarizes and explains findings in a descriptive, qualitative manner, highlighting patterns, themes, and relationships across studies

Results and Discussion

Table 1: Impact of Rapid Growth in Nursing Institutions on Education Quality in Pakistan

Issue	Description	Supporting Evidence
Infrastructure Deficiencies	Many newly established colleges lack proper labs, libraries, and simulation facilities.	Pakistan Nursing Council (PNC) reports highlight disparities in physical infrastructure among new institutions (Khowaja-Punjwani, 2020).
Shortage of Qualified Faculty	Insufficient number of experienced nurse educators to maintain quality instruction.	Faculty-student ratios often exceed recommended standards, compromising teaching quality (Inayat, 2022).
Lack of Standard Oversight	Some colleges operate without strict monitoring or accreditation enforcement.	Reports show inconsistent PNC inspections and weak regulatory mechanisms (Idrees & Zeenat Shah, 2017).
Inconsistent Student Outcomes	Variation in clinical exposure, teaching methods, and assessment practices across institutions.	A cross-sectional study found significant differences in final year nursing students' competencies across provinces (Abbas et al., 2024).
Affiliation Disparities	Colleges affiliated with reputable universities show better student performance than unaffiliated ones.	University-linked programs demonstrate more structured curricula and regular audits (Khan et al., 2022).

Table 2: Faculty Shortage and Its Impact on Nursing Education in Pakistan

Issue	Description	Supporting Evidence
Mismatch in Faculty Supply	The rise in nursing programs has outpaced the recruitment and development of qualified educators.	National statistics show that most new nursing colleges operate with fewer than the recommended number of faculty (Younas, Rasheed, et al., 2019).
Overburdened Faculty	Existing teachers are stretched thin across multiple classes and clinical duties.	Faculty often handle excessive teaching loads, impacting the quality of instruction (O'Meara et al., 2019).
Underprepared Instructors	Many teaching staff lack advanced degrees or formal training in pedagogy.	A study revealed that 40% of instructors had no postgraduate qualification or formal teaching training (Sajjad et al., 2024).
Limited Mentorship Opportunities	Overstretched faculty cannot provide adequate mentoring or individual support to students.	Students report poor access to guidance and supervision during clinical rotations (O'Brien et al., 2019).
Impact on Learning Quality	The student learning experience and clinical preparedness are compromised due to underqualified instruction.	A review found a direct link between faculty qualifications and student competency development (Kalim, 2024).

Table 3: Regulatory Challenges in Enforcing Accreditation and Standards in Nursing Education (Pakistan Context)

Issue	Description	Supporting Evidence
Weak Enforcement of Standards	Despite the PNC's mandate, many institutions operate without fully meeting curriculum or facility standards.	PNC reports show that several nursing colleges continue to function despite not meeting minimum accreditation criteria (Khowaja-Punjwani, 2020).
Delays in Institutional Inspections	Due to logistical and resource constraints, timely inspection of new colleges is often delayed or inconsistent.	Studies report irregular site visits and long approval times for colleges (Sultan et al., 2022).
Inconsistent Evaluation Practices	Lack of uniform benchmarks and subjective assessment tools hinder quality assurance.	Variability in inspection outcomes across provinces reflects inconsistencies in evaluator training and standards (Rabbani & Abbasi, 2017).
Loopholes in Accreditation Process	Gaps in documentation, lobbying, or local influence can sometimes lead to unqualified institutions gaining approval.	A qualitative review found that some colleges used administrative influence to bypass quality control processes (Shahid et al., 2024).
Impact on Education Quality	Poor regulation leads to wide variation in nursing student competencies and employer satisfaction.	Employers have expressed concern over the uneven preparedness of nursing graduates from lesser-regulated institutions (Nizamuddin et al., 2024).

Table 4: Limited Job Market Absorption for Nursing Graduates in Pakistan

Issue	Description	Supporting Evidence
Rising Graduate Numbers	Increasing enrollment and graduation rates from both public and private nursing colleges.	PNC reports a significant rise in annual nursing graduates post-2018 due to proliferation of new institutions (Younas, Zeb, et al., 2019).
Limited Public Sector Jobs	Government hospitals have limited posts with infrequent recruitment drives.	Budget constraints and hiring freezes reduce public sector vacancies for nurses (Hasan & Ahmed, 2023).
Low Salaries in Private Sector	Many private hospitals offer substandard salaries and few benefits.	Studies show entry-level nurses in private hospitals often earn below national minimum wage standards (Khowaja-Punjwani, 2020).
Poor Working Conditions	Lack of job security, extended shifts, and unsafe staffing ratios common in private settings.	Working conditions are cited as one of the top factors for early career dissatisfaction (Cosgrave et al., 2018)
Underemployment and Frustration	Many nurses work below their qualification level or remain unemployed.	Surveys indicate over 40% of recent nursing graduates report not working in nursing roles six months post-graduation (Khan & Begum, 2020).
Migration Intent	Economic and job dissatisfaction drive a high desire among graduates to seek employment abroad.	Data from the Bureau of Emigration shows increasing outflow of nurses to Gulf and Western countries (Shah et al., 2020).

Table 5: Overcrowding in Clinical Placements and Its Impact on Nursing Training in Pakistan

Issue	Description	Supporting Evidence
Increased Student Numbers	Rapid growth in nursing college admissions has led to a surge in the number of students needing clinical training.	Pakistan Nursing Council notes a 40% increase in BSN student intake from 2018 to 2022, without proportional increase in clinical slots (Abbas et al., 2024).
Limited Clinical Placement Capacity	Few tertiary care hospitals are available for clinical rotations, especially in rural or smaller cities.	Many colleges share the same teaching hospitals, resulting in limited access and space for hands-on learning (Chandio et al., 2024).
Overcrowding in Teaching Hospitals	Large groups of students assigned to a single ward or preceptor, hindering focused teaching.	Nurse educators report challenges in engaging students during crowded clinical sessions (Ahmad et al., 2024).
Reduced Faculty-to-Student Ratio	Inadequate number of clinical instructors means less supervision and guidance.	Clinical instructors are often tasked with supervising 10+ students per shift, exceeding international best-practice ratios (Shahab & Cell).
Impaired Skill Acquisition	Students get fewer opportunities to perform procedures and develop clinical confidence.	Competency assessments show weaker hands-on skills among students from overcrowded clinical environments (Ali et al., 2025).
Long-term Impact on Competence	Lack of adequate clinical exposure may lead to underprepared graduates entering the workforce.	Employers report gaps in basic nursing competencies in early-career nurses, especially in critical care and emergency settings (Farooqui et al., 2024).

Table 6: Degree-Oriented Nursing Programs and the Gap in Clinical Competence in Pakistan

Issue	Description	Supporting Evidence
Focus on Academic Credentials	Some nursing programs prioritize awarding degrees over developing practical clinical skills.	Studies indicate that curriculum emphasis is often on theory rather than hands-on training (Azizullah & Mughal, 2024).
Insufficient Clinical Training	Graduates' complete programs without adequate clinical hours or skill practice.	A national survey revealed wide variation in clinical hours completed by students across institutions (Khan & Begum, 2020).
Workforce Credentialing without Readiness	Nurses enter the workforce formally qualified but lack job-ready skills.	Employers report dissatisfaction with the clinical competence of new hires despite proper credentials (Ali et al., 2024).
Mismatch Between Education and Healthcare Needs	Curriculum design does not always align with the practical demands of Pakistan's healthcare system.	A policy review found gaps between educational outcomes and real-world clinical expectations in hospital settings (Akhtar et al., 2018).
Impact on Patient Care Quality	Inadequately prepared nurses may contribute to errors or poor patient outcomes.	Studies link lower clinical preparedness to increased incidence of medication errors and compromised care (Fayyaz et al., 2021).

Table 7: Nursing Graduate Migration and Brain Drain Challenges in Pakistan

Issue	Description	Supporting Evidence
Poor Domestic Job Market	Limited job opportunities and poor working conditions drive graduates to seek employment abroad.	Surveys report over 60% of nursing graduates express intent to migrate for better career prospects (Cheema et al., 2023).
Inconsistent Educational Quality	Variable training quality affects graduates' readiness for international licensing exams and employment.	Graduates from less regulated institutions show lower pass rates on overseas qualification tests (Zafar, 2023).
Gaps in Clinical Training	Deficiencies in hands-on skills reduce competitiveness in foreign job markets.	Employers abroad often report inadequate clinical competence among Pakistani nurse recruits (Shahzadi et al., 2017).
Limited English Proficiency	Insufficient English language skills hinder communication and passing language proficiency tests required overseas.	Studies find language barriers are a significant obstacle for Pakistani nurses applying to Gulf and Western countries (Ullah et al., 2025).
Ongoing Brain Drain	The continuous outflow of skilled nurses exacerbates local healthcare workforce shortages.	National health reports document a growing gap in nurse staffing due to migration trends (Rizwan & Baig, 2024).

Conclusion:

The rapid growth of nursing institutions in Pakistan has led to challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, faculty shortages, and weak regulation, resulting in inconsistent education quality and student competencies. Limited job opportunities and overcrowded clinical placements hinder practical training and contribute to underemployment and nurse migration.

Additionally, a focus on academic credentials over clinical skills creates a workforce not fully prepared for healthcare demands, impacting patient care. To sustain Pakistan's nursing workforce, improvements in faculty development, accreditation enforcement, clinical training, and employment conditions are essential.

Recommendation:

To address challenges in Pakistan's nursing education, strengthen faculty development, enforce accreditation, expand clinical training, and improve employment conditions. These steps will enhance graduate competencies, reduce underemployment, and curb nurse migration.

Implications for Nursing Policy and Practice

Standardization Needed: There is a pressing need to harmonize curricula and enforce uniform accreditation standards across all nursing colleges.

Faculty Development: Investment in training and retaining qualified nurse educators is crucial to sustain quality teaching.

Job Market Planning: Policymakers must link educational outputs with labor market demands to prevent saturation and underemployment.

Clinical Partnerships: Improved collaboration between colleges and hospitals is essential to ensure quality practical training.

Career Counseling and Mobility Pathways: New graduates need structured career guidance and international preparation support if they intend to work abroad.

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