


# Cultural and language awareness in Nursing Mentorship

16.12.2024

As globalization continues to shape higher education, institutions are increasingly welcoming students from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds (Airas, et al., 2019). Creating a culturally sensitive learning environment is essential to support their success and integration. This article is written in collaboration with the culture and language awareness in nursing in Southern Ostrobothnia 2023-2026 (CareEP) project, which emphasizes cultural and language awareness in nursing practices in Southern Ostrobothnia (CareEP, 2023). This article examines the starting points for working with culturally and linguistically diverse students in nursing education. Practical strategies for clinical educators, educational institutions and care organizations are discussed briefly to enhance cultural sensitivity and support the language integration professional developments of the culturally and linguistically diverse students.

## Understanding Cultural Competence

Cultural competence refers to the ability to understand, communicate, and interact effectively across cultures (Terveyden ja hyvinvoinnin laitos, 2024). It encompasses awareness, respect, and a non-judgmental approach to diversity, promoting inclusivity in both teaching and guidance. As a lifelong process, cultural competence requires educators to be committed to ongoing personal and professional development in understanding and appreciating the perspectives and needs of students from diverse cultural backgrounds (Papadopoulous 2006; THL, 2024). According to various theoretical frameworks, cultural competence involves a few core components such as: awareness of the diversity of the people, the ability to empathize with others, an open and nonjudgemental, and a commitment to lifelong learning process and respect for all cultural perspectives (Jirwe et al., 2009).

For educators striving to create inclusive teaching and guiding, self-awareness is essential. Reflecting on their own cultural biases, assumptions, and experiences helps educators understand how their backgrounds shape teaching methods, interactions, and expectations. (THL, 2024). Reflective practices on asking oneself questions such as *1. What culture do I belong to? 2. What does culture mean to me? 3. How does culture influence my daily life? 4. What kind of cultural needs do I have? 5. How would I like others to take my culture into account?* help educators understand their cultural lens and make intentional efforts to avoid prejudices and foster inclusivity (Repo Jamal & Laiho, 2024). This self-awareness enables educators to be more empathetic and responsive to the diverse needs of students, creating a more supportive and equitable learning environment.

# Practical Strategies for Promoting Culturally Sensitive guidance

To promote culturally sensitive guidance among culturally and linguistically diverse students, educators can employ several practical strategies. One crucial approach is fostering open and respectful communication with students from diverse backgrounds (THL, 2024). In culturally diverse settings, students may hesitate to ask questions or seek clarification due to language barriers or cultural differences (THL, 2024).

Educators can address language misunderstanding by creating a supportive and inclusive environment where students feel open to express themselves and seek help. For example, using open-ended questions encourages students to elaborate on their understanding, allowing educators to assess comprehension and provide additional support as needed (Repo Jamal & Laiho, 2024).

Additionally, adapting teaching methods and materials to accommodate various learning styles and cultural perspectives is essential. In language-aware teaching, educators should explicitly incorporate language development into their teaching objectives, ensuring that students can master both content and language skills simultaneously (Virtanen, 2017). Through co-teaching and integrated language and content instruction, students can gradually develop both academic skills and language proficiency (Korpela et al., 2023; Zhao & Dong, 2023). In the clinical settings, students also practice skills using their existing language abilities, with guidance adapting to their progress.

# Opportunities for Intercultural Dialogue and Exchange

Additionally modifying teaching practices, creating opportunities for intercultural dialogue and exchange is crucial for supporting students' integration into the clinical as well as educational settings. According to Airas et al. (2019), international students often face unique challenges when they arrive in a new country, including a lack of established networks and support systems. Therefore, guidance and peer support play an important role in helping students navigate both their academic journey and broader societal integration. Mentoring programs, peer tutoring, and collaborative activities offer students the chance to connect with peers and

experienced professionals, fostering a sense of belonging and support within the university (Leskisenoja & Uusiautti, 2017). By integrating social activities and events into the student experience, educational institutions can promote interaction and build a more cohesive, inclusive environment for all students (Airas et al., 2019). Peer support is particularly valuable for international students (Juntunen et al., 2024). Peer tutoring, for example, offers a platform for advanced students to mentor newcomers, providing guidance and helping them feel more connected. This kind of support is instrumental in easing the integration process, both academically and socially. Moreover, practical training opportunities, such as internships, can provide students with real-world language experiences while also fostering deeper connections with their host community. These activities offer students a chance to practice language skills, develop professional expertise, and integrate more fully into their academic and social environments (Airas et al., 2019).

# Integrating Language Learning with Professional Development

Language development should not be isolated from professional skill-building, especially for students who are preparing to enter the workforce. In language awareness teaching, language learning should be made visible at the target level, such that the students´ learning objectives are divided into subject knowledge and language knowledge (Korpela et al., 2023). The integration of language learning into clinical training offers students an opportunity to develop both language proficiency and professional expertise simultaneously. In clinical settings, internships are a particularly effective platform for this dual development. Internships provide students with authentic environments in which they can actively use the language in real-world contexts such as nurse patient interaction, communication with other team members and patient themselves. These experiences are especially valuable for students with evolving language skills, as they allow them to engage with their profession while also improving their language abilities (Havery, 2019).

To maximize the effectiveness of internships for language and professional development, collaboration between educational institutions and workplace supervisors is key (Korpela et al., 2023; Kamau, 2024). Clinical supervisors must be trained to adopt language and culture-aware guidance practices, ensuring that culturally and linguistically diverse students receive the support they need to grow (Arola, 2017). By fostering dialogue between educators, students, and supervisors, institutions as well as work organizations can ensure that language learning goals are clearly defined and that students have the necessary resources to succeed (Vartiainen & Repo Jamal, 2024). Tools like language agreements clarify language learning objectives during clinical training and enhance collaboration between institutions and workplaces (Eskildsen & Theodorsdottir, 2015).

# Supporting Integration and Providing Comprehensive Support Systems

The integration of culturally and linguistically diverse students requires comprehensive support structures that

address their unique challenges. These students often require more guidance than their domestic counterparts, especially when it comes to navigating language barriers and adjusting to new cultural norms. By providing dedicated mentors, clear language support, and opportunities for intercultural exchange, institutions can help these students overcome these challenges and succeed both academically and professionally. Furthermore, institutions must be proactive in addressing the systemic challenges that hinder integration, such as financial pressures, limited extracurricular involvement, or the absence of established social networks (Airas et al., 2019).

In clinical settings and workplaces, fostering inclusivity involves actively addressing linguistic discrimination while avoiding the creation of isolated linguistic bubble. To achieve this, it is essential to integrate new students and newcomers into Finnish-speaking environments, not by demanding perfect language proficiency but by encouraging the use of developing language skills, even at a basic level. Flexibility in communication, tailored to individual abilities and needs, creates a supportive atmosphere that enhances engagement, learning, and active participation. This approach helps build bridges across diverse linguistic and cultural groups, promoting effective inclusion and mutual understanding.

# Conclusion

Incorporating language and cultural awareness into education is not only beneficial for students but also essential for multicultural environment. This approach helps develop a skilled, culturally competent workforce capable of thriving in a globalized world. By embracing cultural competence and integrating language learning with professional development, higher education institutions as well as clinical settings create an environment where nursing students can succeed.

The article has been prepared as part of the CareEP project, which is co-funded by the European Union. We would like to thank the funder for financing the project and the article.

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