

Cultural Sensitivity in Nursing students: An initial review¹

Amalia Kalamatianou Amalia, Julia A. Spinthourakis, & Epaminondas Panagopoulos,
University of Patras, GR

kalamatianou.amalia@gmail.com

epameinondaspanagopoulos@gmail.com

Abstract

One's identity and world view can be influenced by one's level of understanding of the other. Europe finds itself at a crossroads, and while the issues of intercultural sensitivity are frequently viewed as important in both global and domestic contexts, we tend to limit them to educational and business contexts. Cultural sensitivity is defined as having an awareness of cultural differences. People who work with people who come from different cultural backgrounds face various challenges. These differences make it challenging to offer appropriate health care. Chen and Starosta (1998) define intercultural sensitivity as the subjects' "active desire to motivate themselves to understand, appreciate, and accept differences among cultures" (p. 231). An area where cultural sensitivity has an important role is the provision of nursing care. It embodies knowledge, understanding and skills and is a component of cross-cultural communication skills which are highlight relevant in the health profession. This paper is a review of cultural sensitivity in nursing students and looks at their educational and training needs and the tools available to assess the aforementioned, as a precursor to implementing a research study. It focuses on cultural sensitivity in terms of addressing all positive feelings that grow during or after the interaction and lead to recognition and respect for cultural differences. The presentation can serve as a venue for discussion on the issue of cultural sensitivity training in tertiary health profession education.

Europe at a Crossroads: Rights, Values and Identity

The trend of globalization has increased the importance of being competent in communicating with people of different cultural backgrounds. Globalization has brought together people of diverse cultures, ethnicities, geographies, and religions in every aspect of contemporary human life. Modern societies have dictated a new situation where cultures and teams interact in the frame of a new

¹ If this paper is quoted or referenced, we ask that it be acknowledged as:

Kalamatianou, A., Spinthourakis, JA, & Panagopoulos, E. (2020). The effectiveness of translanguaging language practices in bilingual education: a literature review. In B. Krzywosz-Rynkiewicz & V. Zorbas (Eds.), *Citizenship at a Crossroads: Rights, Identity, and Education* (pp. 322 - 332). Prague, CZ: Charles University and Children's Identity and Citizenship European Association. ISBN: 978-80-7603-104-3.

postmodern situation. Culture is one of the current issues of European policy (Vignoles, Smith, Becker, & Easterbrook, 2018). Europe is more culturally diverse than ever. There are cultural differences between the countries, regions and ethnic groups in Europe (Grasso & Lahusen, 2019). Europe is founded on a community of values such as the respect of human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality and the respect of Human Rights. New Europe becomes increasingly diverse, so they need citizens who have cultural knowledge and have intercultural skills. The new living conditions in the increasingly globalized world have brought about interactions between different cultural contexts (Gobel, Benet-Martinez, Mesquita & Uskul, 2018). However, across the globe people are different and hold different values, lifestyles and perceptions. Therefore, there is a growing need to respect differences. The globalization process requires us to become more knowledgeable about how people from different cultures can communicate effectively and appropriately with each other. Europe finds itself at a crossroads. Thus, the issues of intercultural sensitivity are frequently viewed as important (Balakrishnan, 2015).

Culture

Culture is a complex term whose definitions vary greatly, carrying different meanings depending on the social context and population in which it is applied (Pasikowska-Schnass, 2018). Culture is learned by each generation through both formal and informal life experiences. It is about knowledge and behaviors, attitudes shared and passed on by a group –a shared system of beliefs, values, and behavioral expectations that provide a social structure for daily living (Spencer-Oatey, 2012). Cultures are based on different values. These are important elements of the culture of a society which determines what principles it considers as essential to its well-being and survival. It will usually include important ideals such as freedom, justice, the rule of law, due process, and ceremonies. These ideals form a value system that guides societal life. Thus, cultural diversity is an important topic in most European countries (Henrich, 2015).

Intercultural sensitivity

Over the past two decades, increasing attention has been given to the importance of intercultural sensitivity in human services. Health and mental health researchers have identified disparities among cultural groups in diagnosis, resource utilization, and treatment (Jackson, 2002; Robinson & Morris, 2000). Intercultural sensitivity, being defined by some authors as an attitude reflecting the degree of willingness to interact with people from different cultures, is

considered to be crucial in promoting dialogue between cultures and social cohesion in today's diverse and globalized world (Kriaučiūnienė, 2015).

The term *cultural sensitivity* appears in the literature mostly in the context of interactions taking place in multicultural environments. Intercultural sensitivity refers to the ability to distinguish and experience relevant cultural differences. It is crucial in a globalized context and is an important asset for those who live and work in pluralistic democratic societies (Aktaş, Ertuğ & Öztürk, 2015). Intercultural sensitivity is the emotional dimension of the capacity of intercultural communication. It refers to the person's emotion, which can motivate him to engage in intercultural interactions. Chen and Starosta argued that without the "feeling" that encourages people to engage in intercultural interactions, then the actual act of engaging in interactions remains ineffective (Yunus, Tamam, Bolong, Adzharuddin & Ibrahim, 2017). Bennett (1993) defines *intercultural sensitivity* as a cultural difference experience –an experience that depends on how the individual manufactures the difference. It can also be defined as a set of skills that allows one to learn about and understand people whose cultural background is different. It is important that the concept has become increasingly relevant. Moreover, when you have cultural sensitivity, you can understand their background, experiences, and values (Oksoon, et al., 2017).

A slightly different approach to this issue is represented by G.M. Chen and J.W. Starosta (1997). They assumed that cultural sensitivity is related to cognitive, affective and behavioral aspects of interactive situations and is inseparably connected with emotions. Considering this, they defined cultural sensitivity as the ability of a person to develop positive emotions towards the understanding and appreciation of cultural differences, which induce proper and efficient behavior in intercultural communication. Intercultural sensitivity is employing one's knowledge, consideration, understanding, respect, and adapting after realizing awareness of self and others (Chen & Young, 2012). Cultural sensitivity was, therefore, seen as a dynamic concept according to which culturally sensitive people should be willing to motivate themselves to understand, appreciate and accept cultural differences as well as strive to achieve positive results of intercultural relations. When developing their model, Chen and Starosta referred to the umbrella metaphor, which combines three abilities: cognitive, affective, and behavioral. The effect of such an approach is a model of intercultural communicative competence consisting of three aspects: cultural awareness, sensitivity and ability (Altan, 2018). Cultural sensitivity was of the highest importance as they assumed that in a globalized, multicultural society the aspect that refers to the emotional desire of a person to confirm, appreciate and accept cultural differences via contact must be crucial. They also acknowledged the fact that such positive emotional reactions lead to the recognition and respect of

cultural differences (Fritz et al., 2015). Such a view of cultural sensitivity has become the basis of the study presented below. Bennett (1986, 1993), for instance, defined *intercultural sensitivity* as a development process in which one can transform oneself effectively, cognitively and behaviorally, moving through ethnocentric stages to reach ethno-relative stages. Bennett's developmental model of intercultural sensitivity provides the theoretical framework for understanding and assessing intercultural sensitivity within the framework of cross-cultural adjustment and adaptation.

Cultural sensitivity in nursing students

Cultural sensitivity increases the quality of health services due to its positive outcomes such as efficient communication, efficient intervention, and increased satisfaction (Foronda 2008). Cultural sensitivity requires knowledge evaluation as well as respect and cultural harmonization (McMurray, 2007). Healthcare professionals are required to know the cultural differences and values, evaluate individuals and groups with their own customs and traditions from different perspectives, understand their healthcare needs, and adapt their interventions with their own culture (Kim et al., 2017).

Cultural sensitivity serves as a foundation for the development of cultural competence, and intercultural sensitivity is a component of cross-cultural communication skills (Chen & Young, 2012). The provision of intercultural health care is a professional and moral responsibility and obligation for nurses both today and in the future (Douglas et al., 2011). Nursing students who are aware that the values and behaviors of individuals are affected by their culture will evaluate the planning and delivery of health care within this context to improve the effectiveness of health care (Boutikouka et al., 2017). Cultural sensitivity is defined as the care and ability of the nurse to respond to the attitudes of groups of people who share a racial, ethnic, religious and linguistic heritage. It refers to the sensitivity or orientation in the differences between cultures and is a multidisciplinary structure that is actively discussed in areas such as education, communication and nursing (Balakrishnan, 2015). Intercultural sensitivity uses knowledge, appreciation, comprehension, and respect for self-realization and others. Cultural sensitivity serves as a foundation for the development of cultural capacity and is the component of intercultural communication skills. Cultural sensitivity is very important for the provision of health services (Yilmaz, Toksoy, Direk, Bezirgan, & Boylu, 2017). Intercultural sensitivity is the emotional dimension of competence and is defined as "an active willingness to create their own motivation to understand, accept and appreciate intercultural differences" (Simsek, Erkin, & Temel, 2017). Intercultural sensitivity is a prerequisite for

intercultural competence. According to Hammer, Bennett, & Wiseman (2003a), it is defined as the ability of a person to distinguish cultural differences. As Bhawuk and Brislin (1992) points out, individuals should be interested in other cultures, be sensitive, observe cultural differences and respect them to be effective (Bhawuk & Brislin, 1992). McMurray (2003) argues that cultural sensitivity requires openness and respect for cultural differences. It also emphasizes that cultural sensitivity includes respect for cultural differences and requires an understanding of the dynamics of another culture. Only in this way can nurses begin to assess behavioral patterns in patients from different cultural backgrounds that may influence their attitudes towards managing health issues.

Cultural sensitivity is a key feature for health professionals because of its impact on improving health outcomes and reducing health inequalities. The assessment of nurses' cultural sensitivity is vital in countries facing demographic and social changes due to migration (Yilmaz, Toksoy, Direk, Bezirgan, & Boylu, 2017). Bhawuk and Brislin (1992) support an alternative definition of intercultural sensitivity, such as the ability to understand different cultures and opinions and to shape cultural-based behaviors. Based on this definition, a model of four factors emerged using the open mind, flexibility, individualism and collectivism as factors. The *open mind* refers to an orientation where individuals are not opposed to differences of opinion, customs, beliefs etc. *Flexibility* refers to the ability to adapt to behaviors in unknown environments. *Individualism* is a context centered on itself or independence, while *collectivism* is a context that focuses on others. In order to achieve *cultural sensitivity*, students must have knowledge of cultural differences and values. This knowledge can be acquired through training, education, or experience with patients from different contexts (Oksoon et al., 2017). In nursing care, nurses need to know and respect the culturally well-founded values, beliefs and practices of patients to ensure safety and quality of care. Patients need health professionals who appreciate and respect their cultural aspects, opinions and beliefs and communicate effectively. Patients feel more satisfied with the care of health professionals who are motivated to learn about other cultures and those who demonstrate knowledge, skills and attitudes about cultural sensitivity. An account is taken of dietary habits, customs and traditions in culturally sensitive nursing care. A third essential feature is *understanding*. The fourth characteristic and a fundamental element of cultural sensitivity is *respect*. Nursing students showing respect for the culture and the language of patients are consistent with cultural sensitivity (Foronda, 2008).

Nursing students must recognize the importance of cultural sensitivity in their practices and work to increase their own intercultural competence. Nursing students can communicate with patients from other cultures if they are culturally sensitive (Aktaş, Ertuğ & Öztürk, 2015). Cultural sensitivity is related to the

willingness to use cultural knowledge while interacting with patients and examining culture during discussions and recommendations for treatment. It further includes understanding and respecting the values, beliefs and attitudes of others. If there is no cultural sensitivity, it is difficult for health professionals who are trying to offer the best possible services. Nursing students should recognize the importance of cultural sensitivity in their practices and work to increase their own intercultural competence (Ulrey & Amason, 2001). According to the literature, it was noted that sensitivity is characterized by the recognition of diversity. The realization of these concepts leads to an internal process of self-exploration of personal racial prejudices (Prosen, 2015). Intercultural sensitive students can reach the level of dual identity and enjoy cultural differences (Chen & Starosta, 2000). Cultural sensitivity must be integrated into the required curriculum's teaching ability to teach culturally sensitive care (O'Connell, et al., 2013). For nurses to enhance cultural sensitivity to vulnerable population groups, the curriculum should be improved to help nurses respond to the needs of individuals from different cultural backgrounds, avoid potential cultural conflicts and become culturally sensitive (Yilmaz, Toksoy, Direk, Bezirgan & Boylu, 2017). Cultural sensitivity to diversity and foreign culture relieves individuals of behaviors that are possessed by stereotypes and prejudices. The modern student must respect cultural differences and at the same time approach the patient's family in a unique way resulting in the best possible cooperation and efficiency in nursing care.

Intercultural sensitivity in Greek nursing students

Intercultural sensitivity is one of the important dimensions for people who work or live in intercultural workplaces where cultural differences occur. Thus, it is very important for graduate nursing students to develop their cultural sensitivities. A series of recent studies has indicated that the students were sensitive to the health care of immigrants and treated them with respect. They collected cultural data in order to understand their culture. Cultural sensitivity requires openness and respect for cultural differences. Nursing students accept and appreciate different views and ideas. When they communicate with patients, they feel confident (Kaukia, 2003).

Though they acknowledge this, they do not have the necessary knowledge to effectively approach and provide care to patients from various cultural groups (Boutikouka, et al., 2017). Cultural differences affect patients' attitudes about medical care and their ability to understand, manage, and cope with the course of an illness, the meaning of a diagnosis, and the consequences of medical treatment. There is no educational preparation in Greek nursing students on

intercultural nursing and do not gain intercultural sensitivity training in their studies. Moreover, it is worth noting that the lack of cultural training on the part of health professionals leads to a wrong diagnosis of the patient's problem (Pournaras, Tsombanou, Surtzi, 2004).

Why Greek nursing students need cultural sensitivity?

Greece has become a host country of immigrants. Nurses are confronted with new challenges every day, especially during the recent years (Pournaras, Tsombanou, Surtzi, 2004). Cultural sensitivity increases the quality of health services due to its positive effects such as effective communication, effective intervention and increased satisfaction (Kaukia, 2003). It has also been found that the seamless integration of immigrants in society is an essential issue that needs proper handling on the part of both the state and the citizens in order to address the challenges arising from the provision of healthcare services (Kalokairinou - Anagnostopoulou & Koutas, 2011). The conditions people live under are influenced by both economic and political issues in the increasingly globalized world which have been brought about by the interactions among people from different cultures. Human rights include the right to appropriate health care from well trained and sensitive medical professionals. In general, culturally congruent health care is a basic human right. Access to good care is a basic value. Identity speaks to both the recipients of health care as well as to the nurse practitioners and refers to how a person defines themselves culturally, based on their unique experiences (Kalokerinou, Kodella & Tolika, 2003).

Educational and training needs

Based on the review, it is suggested that nurses need to know and respect the cultural beliefs and practices of patients in order to ensure safety and quality of healthcare. They should have the ability to understand and apply knowledge regarding patients' value systems. They should also explore new ways of providing cultural care in multicultural societies and understand how cultures affect health (Gerogiannis & Plexida, 2008). Nursing students need cultural awareness, knowledge, and experience. Culturally sensitive nursing practices involve the identification of cultural needs and the understanding of cultural links between family and individuals in order to provide care without affecting their cultural belief system. They must recognize the importance of cultural sensitivity in their practices and work to increase their own intercultural competence (Aktaş, Ertuğ & Öztürk, 2015). In addition, there needs to be a change in their current and future nursing practices. Educational institutions in the field of health are required

to train students, who are sensitive to and aware of cultural problems. This also includes considering patients' cultural needs. To sum up, nursing is a profession that is based on a holistic approach to health care delivery (Pournaras, Tsombanou, Surtzi, 2004).

REFERENCES

- Aktaş, D., Ertuğ, N., & Öztürk, E. (2015). Investigation into Intercultural Sensitivity among Nursing Students at a University in Turkey. *The New Educational Review*, 40(2), 48-57 <https://doi.org/10.15804/tner.2015.40.2.04>
- Altan, M. Z. (2018). Intercultural Sensitivity A Study of Pre-service English Language Teachers. *Journal of Intercultural Communication*, 46, 1-1.
- Athanasopoulou, M., & Christodoulou, E. (2011). Intercultural approach to families with a different culture than health professionals. *Hellenic Journal of Nursing Science*, 4(3), 62-66.
- Balakrishnan, A. (2015). *Asking the Right Questions: Insights into Assessing Intercultural Sensitivity*. Electronic Thesis and Dissertation Repository.
- Bennett, M. (1993). Toward ethnorelativism: A developmental model of intercultural sensitivity. *International Journal of Development in Higher Education*, 51-60.
- Bhawuk, D., & Brislin, R. (1992). The measurement of intercultural sensitivity using the concepts of individualism and collectivism. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* (16), 413-36. Retrieved 20/10/2018 from: https://www.academia.edu/22722846/The_measurement_of_intercultural_sensitivity_using_the_concepts_of_individualism_and_collectivism
- Boutsiouka, E., Kalokerinou, A., Patitiraki, E., Souttzi, P., Konstantinou, E., & Giannakopoulou, M. (2017). Nursing Students' Beliefs Concerning the Adequacy of Their Knowledge and Competences for Intercultural Care: Pilot Study. [in Greek] *ΝΟΣΗΛΕΥΤΙΚΗ*, 56(1), 69-77. Retrieved: 4/5/2019 from www.hjn.gr/wp-content/uploads/.../56_1_580_EREYNHTIKH_BOUTSIOUKA.pdf
- Chen G.M., & Young P. (2012). Intercultural communication competence. In: Goodboy A., & Shultz K., (eds.), *Introduction to Communication: Translating Scholarship into Meaningful Practice*. Dubuque, IA: Kendall-Hunt pp. 175–188
- Chen, G. M., & Starosta, W. J. (1997). A review of the concept of intercultural sensitivity. *Human Communication*, 1, 1-16.

- Chen, G. M., & Starosta, W. J. (2000). The development and validation of the intercultural communication sensitivity scale. *Human Communication*, 3, 1-15.
- Foronda, C. L. (2008). A concept analysis of cultural sensitivity. *Journal of transcultural nursing: Official journal of the Transcultural Nursing Society / Transcultural Nursing Society* 19(3), 207-212.
- Grasso, M. T., & Lahusen, C. (2019). European Solidarity at a Crossroads? Citizens' Attitudes and Political Behaviors in Europe. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 63(4), 423-429.
- Gerogiannis, G.K., & Plexida, A.N. (2008). Culture and Nursing Education: New Perspectives and Necessities in Greek Nursing Reality. *The Step of Asklepios*, 7(2), 113-119.
- Gobel, M. S., Benet-Martinez, V., Mesquita, B., & Uskul, A. K. (2018). Europe's Culture(s): Negotiating Cultural Meanings, Values, and Identities in the European Context. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 49(6), 858-867.
- Hartman, D. (2017). *Self-Efficacy and Cultural Competency Assessment of the Associate Degree Nursing Student*. Walden Dissertations and Doctoral Studies.
- Henrich, J. (2015). Culture and social behavior. *Current Opinion in Behavioral Sciences*, 3, 84-89.
- Jackson, V. H. (2002). Cultural competency: The challenges posed by a culturally diverse society and steps toward meeting them. *Behavioral Health Management*, 27(4), 421-43.
- Kalokerinou - Anagnostopoulou, A. & Koutas, Ch. (2011). *Intercultural nursing and cultural competence for health professionals*. Athens: Medical Publications by P. Ch. Paschalidis. [in Greek]
- Kalokerinou, A., Kodella, K., & Tolika, F. (2003). Theoretical Approaches to Intercultural Nursing. *Nursing*, 42, 451 - 456.
- Kaukia Th., (2003), *The Nephrology Nurse of Intercultural Effects*, Proceedings of the 14th Scientific Meeting of Nursing Nurses.
- Kim, O., Dancel, M., Dancel, R., Baniassen, J...et al. (2017). The Intercultural Sensitivity of Korean University Students for the Development of Programs Promoting Intercultural Sensitivity. *청소년문화포럼* (2017): 7-39. <http://effyc.re.kr/xml/11027/11027.pdf>
- Kriauciūnienė, R. (2015). Some issues of intercultural sensitivity and values, *Verbum*, 50, 216-227. doi: 10.15388/Verb.2014.5.5010.

McMurray, A.A. (2007). *Measuring Intercultural Sensitivity of International and Domestic College Students: The impact of international travel* (Master's Thesis, University of Florida, Florida, US)

Pasikowska-Schnass, M. (2018). *Promoting European culture*. EPRS | European Parliamentary Research Service.

[https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2018/623555/EPRS_BRI\(2018\)623555_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2018/623555/EPRS_BRI(2018)623555_EN.pdf)

Pournaras N. Tsombanou M, Surtzi P., (2004), Educational Needs of Nursing Students in the Intercultural Health Care, *Nursing*, 43 (2): 185-194. [in Greek]

Robinson, D. T., & Morris, J. R. (2000). Multicultural counseling: Historical context and current training considerations. *Western Journal of Black Studies*, 24(4), 239-53.

Simsek, H., Erkin, O., & Temel, A. (2017). Cultural Sensitivity and Related Factors among Nurse Educators in Turkey. *International Journal of Caring Sciences*, 10(3), 1374- 1384.

Spencer-Oatey, H. (2012) What is culture? A compilation of quotations. GlobalPAD Core Concepts.
<http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/al/globalpad/interculturalskills/>

Stephenson, V. (2014). *Teaching Strategies to Accommodate Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students in Online Nursing Courses*. Retrieved from Sophia, the St. Catherine University.

Terzoudis, S., Boigatzidis, P., & Kostoyola, P. (2017). Primary health care for immigrants when welcoming them to Greece Designing this in a multidisciplinary non-governmental organization. *Archives of Hellenic Medicine*, 34 (1), 113 - 122.

Ulrey K.L., & Amason P. (2001). Intercultural communication between patients and health care providers: an exploration of intercultural communication effectiveness, cultural sensitivity, stress, and anxiety. *Health Communication*, 13(4), 449-63. https://doi.org/10.1207/S15327027HC1304_06

Vignoles, V. L., Smith, P. B., Becker, M., & Easterbrook, M. J. (2018). In Search of a Pan-European Culture: European Values, Beliefs, and Models of Selfhood in Global Perspective. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 49(6), 868 – 887.

Yilmaz, M., Toksoy, S., Direk, Z., Bezirgan, S., & Boylu, M. (2017). Cultural Sensitivity Among Clinical Nurses: A Descriptive Study. *Journal of nursing scholarship: an official publication of Sigma Theta Tau International Honor Society of Nursing* 49(2), 153-161

Yunus, N., Tamam, E., Bolong, J., Adzharuddin, N. A., & Ibrahim, F. (2017). Validation of intercultural sensitivity three factor model in Malaysian context. *SHS Web of Conferences*, 33, 1-6. Retrieved 20/5/2019 from:

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/313271050_Validation_of_intercultural_sensitivity_three-factor_model_in_Malaysian_context