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BRIDGING THE GAP: EXPLORING THE CHALLENGES IN BALANCING NURSING THEORY WITH CLINICAL PRACTICE OF BS NURSING STUDENTS

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Abstract

The theory–practice gap remains one of the major challenges in nursing education, particularly among BS Nursing students during clinical rotations. Although students receive extensive theoretical instruction in classrooms and skills laboratories, many experience difficulty applying this knowledge effectively in real clinical settings. This study aimed to explore BS Nursing students' perceptions regarding the alignment between theoretical instruction and clinical procedures and to identify the challenges they faced in balancing nursing theory with clinical practice. A qualitative phenomenological design was used to obtain an in-depth understanding of students' experiences and perspectives. Purposive sampling was employed to select BS Nursing students who had completed clinical rotations and possessed relevant clinical exposure. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews using an interview guide developed according to the study objectives and related literature. Ethical principles were strictly maintained throughout the study, and informed consent was obtained from all participants before data collection. Confidentiality, anonymity, voluntary participation, and the right to withdraw from the study were ensured. The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis, which resulted in four major themes: theoretical knowledge's twofold function, clinical application barriers, institutional and supervision difficulties, and psychological repercussions for students. The findings revealed that theoretical knowledge provided students with confidence and technical understanding; however, challenges such as unpredictable patient behavior, inadequate supervision, communication gaps, limited resources, workload pressure, and differences between classroom teaching and ward practices created difficulty in applying theory during clinical care. The study also found that these challenges affected students emotionally by causing fear, anxiety, confusion, and low confidence. The study concluded that a significant gap exists between nursing

theory and clinical practice. It is recommended that nursing institutions strengthen collaboration with clinical sites, improve supervision, integrate simulation-based learning, provide supportive clinical environments, and enhance practical training opportunities to bridge the theory–practice gap and improve nursing education outcomes.

INTRODUCTION

Nursing education is a practice-based discipline, which requires students to acquire theoretical understanding and clinical competence. Students in BS Nursing programs are taught scientific concepts, nursing theories, patient assessment, documentation, communication, pharmacology, infection prevention, and procedural skills in classroom and skills laboratory settings. But the aim of this theoretical preparation is not only to prepare students for passing exams but also to prepare them for safe and effective patient care during clinical rotations. Clinical practice is where students are expected to apply classroom learning to professional performance, by applying knowledge, developing clinical judgment, communicating with patients and participating in nursing procedures under supervision. Recent literature continues to highlight that nursing education is made up of theory and practice as two complementary components and that clinical training is essential to develop problem-solving, decision-making and critical thinking abilities in undergraduate nursing students (Hobenu et al., 2025). Despite the importance of clinical learning, many of the nursing students experience difficulty in the transition from academic instructions to real hospital practice. This challenge is often referred to as the theory-practice gap, the discrepancy between what students learn in classrooms and what they see or are expected to do in clinical settings. One of the main challenges in nursing education is the gap between theoretical education and practical competence, and students often struggle to transfer knowledge learned in the classroom to actual clinical practice (Daneshfar & Karimi Moonaghi, 2025). This gap can erode students' confidence, influence decision-making and affect the quality of patient care (Daneshfar & Karimi Moonaghi, 2025). This issue is particularly pertinent for BS Nursing students, as clinical rotations are a pivotal phase in which students start to develop professional identity, confidence,

technical skills and patient-safety behaviors.Theoretical instruction is the basis for nursing practice. “It helps students learn about disease processes, nursing interventions, ethics, documentation principles, medication safety and evidence-based care.” Students with good theoretical background are more likely to know why a procedure is done, what can be the complications and how to ensure patient safety. For example, knowledge of infection control prepares students to practice aseptic techniques and knowledge of pharmacology supports safe medication administration . Altunsoy and Dag (2025) stated that in the evaluation of readiness for safe care, both the perceived knowledge of nursing students about patient safety in the classroom and their competence in clinical practice were important. However, only theoretical knowledge may not be sufficient when students face unpredictable patients, heavy workload, limited equipment, or ward practices differing from textbook procedures (Altunsoy & Dag, 2025).Students are exposed to clinical practice with real patients and the situations they face are not always completely mirrored in lectures or demonstrations. Patients may be anxious, aggressive, confused, uncooperative, critically ill, or emotionally distraught. Students might have problems in following the steps from the textbook exactly as they were taught. Cui et al. (2025) described this experience as a part of students’ “reality shock” in which students undergo emotional challenges and cognitive changes after entering the clinical environment. Their qualitative study showed that students’ clinical behavior and identity are affected by authentic clinical experiences, guidance by instructors, and observation of experienced nurses (Cui et al.,

2025). Therefore, students' perceptions of the alignment between theory and clinical procedures are important because they influence their perceptions of nursing practice, their levels of confidence and their safety when carrying out clinical duties.

Supervision is another important factor in the theory-practice relationship. Clinical instructors, preceptors and senior staff nurses are the bridge between academic learning and bedside practice. Supervision is supportive as students are provided with guidance, feedback, correction and encouragement. Without proper supervision, students can get lost, unsupported, and afraid to make mistakes. (2025) Gheisari et al. reported that a clinical supervision model based on ISBAR during handover improved the clinical decision-making, self-efficacy and handover skills of nursing internship students. Similarly, structured, supportive and psychologically safe supervision improved students' competence, confidence and patient-safety-oriented behaviours during clinical practice according to Bartoníčková et al. (2026). These findings indicate that supervision is not a supplement to clinical education, but a crucial factor in enabling students to apply theory safely and with confidence. The clinical learning environment also has an important influence on students' ability to balance theory and practice. The positive clinical environment includes respectful communication, student participation, teamwork, resources, constructive feedback and opportunities to perform procedures under supervision . Instead, a stressful or unsupportive environment may lead students to observe passively rather than actively learn. Peng et al. (2025) found that the clinical learning environment was positively associated with professional identity, learning engagement, and stress-related growth of nursing students. Their study results suggest that nursing students are more likely to build a stronger professional identity when clinical settings offer supportive interpersonal relationships, task orientation, team culture, and student involvement (Peng et al., 2025). This is relevant to the present study, since the students' ability to connect theory and practice depends not only on their personal knowledge but also on the quality of the clinical setting.

Simulation-based learning has also been identified as a key strategy to bridge the theory–practice gap. Simulation provides students the opportunity to practice clinical procedures, communication, decision making, and patient-safety responses in a controlled environment prior to caring for real patients. Daneshfar and Karimi Moonaghi (2025) found simulation-based education to be an effective and scalable strategy for bridging the theory–practice gap if it is supported by institutional commitment and pedagogical integration. Similar results were reported by Lee et al. (2025), who found that the "Room of Horrors" simulation helped learners identify patient-safety hazards and relate safety knowledge to clinical practice. Furthermore, Mohamed et al. (2025) found that simulated clinical immersion was more effective than traditional lecture-based teaching in enhancing nursing students' knowledge, clinical self-efficacy, and readiness for end of-life care. These studies demonstrate how simulation can close the gap between classroom learning and clinical performance by providing students with authentic opportunities to apply theory.

Another concern in nursing education is the psychological effects of the theory–practice gap. Students may be confident in learning procedures in the classroom but may experience fear, anxiety, and low confidence when performing the same procedures on real patients. This is particularly so in high risk areas such as medication administration, emergency care, psychiatric care and invasive procedures. Butun et al. (2025) found that nursing students had low levels of self-efficacy and self-confidence in administering pediatric medication and moderate levels of anxiety in clinical decision-making. Academic anxiety and negative affect were also found to be negative predictors of nursing students' achievement, while motivation, well-being, social support and self-esteem were positive predictors (Alqalah et al., 2025). The results show that the emotional state of the students has a direct impact on their learning and performance and psychological support is an important part of clinical education.

Patient safety is strongly linked to the agreement between theory and clinical practice. If students are taught a standard way in the class and they see a different practice in the ward they may be confused about the standard. This uncertainty can affect safe care especially when students are unsupervised or feel pressured to take shortcuts. Lu et al. (2026) highlighted that patient-safety education for undergraduate nursing students needs to be systematically implemented, evaluated and reinforced, as students require knowledge, skills and attitudes that can be transferred to real clinical settings. Therefore, it is imperative to explore the perceptions of students regarding theoretical instruction and clinical procedures in order to identify gaps that may influence learning outcomes and patient safety (Lu et al., 2026).

The present research is significant in the context of BS Nursing education as it is concerned with the students' perception of the relationship of what they are taught and what they have to do in clinical rotations. It also examines challenges faced by students in balancing theory with practical demands. These challenges may include differences between textbook procedures and ward routines, limited availability of instructors, communication gaps between academic and clinical institutions, limited resources, patient unpredictability, emotional stress and pressure to take shortcuts. Understanding these experiences can assist nursing educators, clinical instructors and hospital administrators in improving curriculum planning, enhancing supervision, improving simulation-based preparation and creating supportive clinical learning environments.The present study therefore aims to explore the BS Nursing students' perceptions on the correspondence of theoretical teaching and clinical procedures and to identify the challenges faced by the students in balancing nursing theory and clinical practice. The research has the potential to improve clinical education, reduce the theory-practice gap, support students' confidence and promote safe, competent and patient-centred nursing care through examining students' lived experiences.

Research Objectives

1.To identify the challenges faced by BS Nursing students in balancing nursing theory with clinical practice.

Research Questions

1. What are the challenges faced by students of BS Nursing in balancing nursing theory with clinical practice?

Problem Statement: The BS Nursing education is meant to prepare students with the theoretical knowledge as well as clinical competence. Many nursing students find themselves in a difficult situation when moving from the classroom to the clinical setting. They learn nursing theories, procedures, documentation, patient assessment, communication skills and principles of safety in the classroom but the real hospital environment often presents situations that are more complex, unpredictable and demanding. Clinical rotations can expose students to inconsistencies between textbook protocols and ward practices, inadequate supervision, limited resources, communication difficulties, and pressure to adopt shortcuts common in the clinical setting. This may lead to students feeling anxious, confused and less confident when applying theoretical knowledge to patient care. This creates a theory-practice gap, which can impact on students' learning, professional development, clinical decision-making and patient safety.

Recent literature suggests that the gap between theory and practice remains a major concern in nursing education. Daneshfar and Karimi Moonaghi (2025) reported that nursing students often face challenges in transferring knowledge gained from the classroom into real clinical settings, which can lead to reduced confidence, impaired decision-making, and impact patient care. Similarly, Hobenu et al. (2025) stressed the significance of effective clinical teaching strategies in undergraduate nursing education since clinical learning improves students' problem-solving, decision-making and critical thinking skills. Supervision is another important factor. Bartoníčková et al. (2026) found that structured and psychologically safe supervision improved

nursing students' confidence, competence and patient-safety behaviors during clinical practice. Moreover, Lu et al. (2026) asserted that patient safety education for undergraduate nursing students should be standardized across nursing programs and delivered through various educational methods so that it is translated into safe practice. The findings suggest that the gap between nursing theory and clinical practice is not only a student-related issue but also an institutional, supervisory, and educational challenge that needs systematic investigation. In view of this, the study aims to determine the perceptions of BS Nursing students on the congruence of theoretical instruction and clinical procedures and to identify the challenges they face in bridging nursing theory and clinical practice.

Literature Review

The education of nurses is based on the combination of theory and clinical practice. BS Nursing students learn the concepts of anatomy, physiology, pharmacology, nursing theories, patient assessment, documentation, infection prevention, communication, ethics, and patient safety. But the success of this education hinges on how well students can transfer classroom knowledge to clinical rotations. The theory–practice gap is still a major challenge in nursing education according to recent literature, since students often find it difficult to apply their theoretical learning to actual patient care situations (Daneshfar & Karimi Moonaghi, 2025). Therefore, clinical practice is considered a vital component of nursing education as it cultivates decision-making, critical thinking, professional behavior, and practical competence (Hobenu et al., 2025). The theory-practice gap is the disconnect between what nursing students learn in an academic environment and what they observe or do in a clinical setting. Daneshfar and Karimi Moonaghi (2025) reported that it is hard for nursing students to transfer knowledge from the classroom to the actual clinical world, which may affect their confidence and the care they offer to patients. This is an important gap because theoretical knowledge alone cannot adequately prepare students for unpredictable clinical realities such as unstable patients, emergency situations, workload pressure, and differences in ward practices (Cui et al., 2025). Likewise Hobenu et al. (2025) highlighted the need to improve clinical teaching strategies to enable undergraduate nursing students to link theoretical concepts with practical care.

Theoretical knowledge is still an important basis for nursing students. It helps students understand the science behind nursing procedures and aids safe decision-making in patient care. Altunsoy and Dag (2025) determined a close relationship between the patient safety knowledge of nursing students in the classroom and their competence in clinical practice. This means that classroom learning should be done in order to prepare students to detect risks and to observe safe procedures. However, textbook-based procedures may confuse students when they differ from the practices used by staff nurses in busy clinical settings (Altunsoy & Dag, 2025). Therefore theory is only useful if students are shown how to use it properly in clinical situations.Clinical practice is an opportunity for students to translate theoretical knowledge into professional skills. Students learn how to communicate with patients, perform procedures, manage time, observe professional behavior, and participate in patient care through clinical rotations. Peng et al. (2025) state that a positive clinical learning environment can foster nursing students' professional identity, learning engagement, and stress-related growth. This suggests that students learn more effectively when the clinical environment supports participation, communication, feedback and teamwork (Peng et al., 2025). Similarly, Zhang et al. (2025) found that clinical learning environments influenced the psychological resilience and caring behaviors of undergraduate nursing interns. Clinical rotations, an essential component of medical training, may present challenges for students. Among these barriers are limited supervision, heavy workload of staff nurses, lack of resources, poor communication between academic and clinical institutions and differences between laboratory equipment and hospital equipment. Supervision

was found to have a positive influence on patient safety of nursing students in clinical practice (Bartoníčková et al., 2026). In their review, they found that structured, supportive and psychologically safe supervision improves students' competence, confidence and safety-oriented behaviors (Bartoníčková et al., 2026). This shows that supervision is one of the most important determinants for reducing the theory–practice gap.

Clinical supervision also helps students to build confidence in performing procedures and making decisions. Gheisari et al. (2025) reported the effectiveness of a clinical supervision model based on ISBAR on nursing internship students' clinical decision-making, self-efficacy, and handover skills. The results indicate that structured supervision may help students to organize patient information and use theoretical knowledge in clinical communication. If supervision is weak, students may resort to observation instead of active learning, which can reduce clinical competence and increase anxiety (Gheisari et al., 2025). Thus, clinical instructors and staff nurses are an integral part of facilitating students' integration of classroom theory with bedside practice.Simulation-based learning has also been recognized as an effective medium to close the gap between theory and practice. Daneshfar and Karimi Moonaghi (2025) indicated that clinical simulation can enhance students' competence, decision-making, confidence, and knowledge transfer by providing realistic clinical scenarios within a controlled setting. Simulation enables students to practice procedures before performing them on real patients, alleviating fear and enhancing preparedness (Daneshfar & Karimi Moonaghi, 2025). Moreover, Lee et al. (2025) noted that patient safety simulation, such as the "Room of Horrors," assists nursing learners to recognize hazards and connect safety knowledge with clinical action..Another significant issue nursing students experience in clinical practice is reality shock. Cui et al. (2025) defined reality shock as an emotional and cognitive response of students when clinical reality does not meet their expectations. Classroom learning can build students' confidence in the clinical setting, but actual patient care can bring about fear, stress, confusion, and low self-confidence (Cui et al., 2025). It's especially true when students deal with aggressive patients, emergency situations, pressure from staff or procedures they haven't practiced enough. Reality shock may affect students' professional behaviors, emotional well-being and willingness to participate in clinical activities (Cui et al., 2025).

The theory–practice gap is intimately associated with patient safety. Students who learn standard safety procedures in class but see shortcuts in the ward can become confused as to which practice to follow. Lu et al. (2026) highlighted that patient safety education should be standardized in the nursing program and delivered through diverse educational approaches for undergraduate nursing students. They also pointed to the need for effective evaluation tools to ensure that safety learning is translated into safe clinical practice (Lu et al., 2026). This lends support to the idea of teaching patient safety not just as a theoretical subject but as part of clinical rotations, simulation, supervision and assessment. Another outcome of the theory-practice relationship is the development of professional identity. Students who receive supportive clinical guidance and meaningful learning opportunities are more likely to develop a positive view of nursing as a profession. Peng et al. (2025) found that clinical learning environments influence professional identity via learning engagement and stress-related growth. Similarly, in recent literature, it has been demonstrated that professional identity is developed progressively during BS Nursing programs and clinical rotations as students develop clarity and confidence in their role (Mao et al., 2025). This indicates that clinical practice is not only about skills but also about shaping the identity of students as future nurses. Psychological factors also contribute to students' ability to balance theory and practice. Nursing students may feel anxious while doing procedures, talking with patients or making clinical decisions. Alqalah et al. (2025) found that academic anxiety and negative emotional states may affect the achievement of

nursing students, while motivation, well-being, social support and self-esteem can enhance academic outcomes. Moreover, Butun et al. (2025) also discovered that nursing students might be anxious and have low self-efficacy in clinical decision-making, particularly in medication-related situations. These findings suggest that emotional support, confidence boosting strategies and mentorship are required to help students to safely apply theory in practice.

Recent literature shows that the theory-practice gap in BS Nursing students is a multi-dimensional problem. The influences are curriculum design, clinical environment, supervision, simulation opportunities, education on patient safety, psychological readiness, and institutional support. The studies reviewed suggest that students need strong theoretical preparation, but they also need structured clinical exposure, supportive supervision, realistic simulation, and emotionally safe learning environments (Bartoníčková et al., 2026; Daneshfar & Karimi Moonaghi, 2025; Hobenu et al., 2025; Lu et al., 2026). Thus, more studies are needed to find out the perceptions of BS Nursing students about the congruence between theoretical instruction and clinical procedures, and the challenges they face in bridging nursing theory and clinical practice.

Research Methodology

Research Design:

This study used a qualitative phenomenological research design to explore the perceptions of BS Nursing students on the congruence between theory and clinical practice and the challenges they face in integrating theory and practice. A qualitative approach was considered suitable as it allowed the researchers to gain an in-depth understanding of students' experiences, feelings, and perspectives concerning the theory–practice gap in nursing education. The design allowed the researchers to obtain rich narratives from participants on their clinical learning experiences, confidence, supervision, and psychological challenges during clinical rotations.

Sampling Technique

For this study, purposive sampling technique was used for selection of the participants having direct experience of the theoretical learning and clinical practice during their BS Nursing education. Participants were selected on the basis of their ability to provide rich and relevant information regarding the research topic. The study was conducted on BS Nursing students who had completed clinical rotations in different hospital units as they are more familiar with the relation between classroom teaching and practical nursing procedures. Data saturation was achieved, that is, no new themes or relevant information were found in the participants' responses, and sampling stopped

Research Instrument

Data were collected using a semi-structured interview guide developed by the researchers based on the study objectives and the pertinent literature. The interview guide contained open-ended questions to explore students' perception of theoretical instruction, experiences during clinical practice, challenges in applying theory, experiences of supervision and psychological responses during clinical rotations. The semi-structured format enabled the participants to freely express their opinions and also allowed the researchers to seek further clarifications when required. The interviews took place in a quiet and comfortable setting to encourage open communication and detailed responses

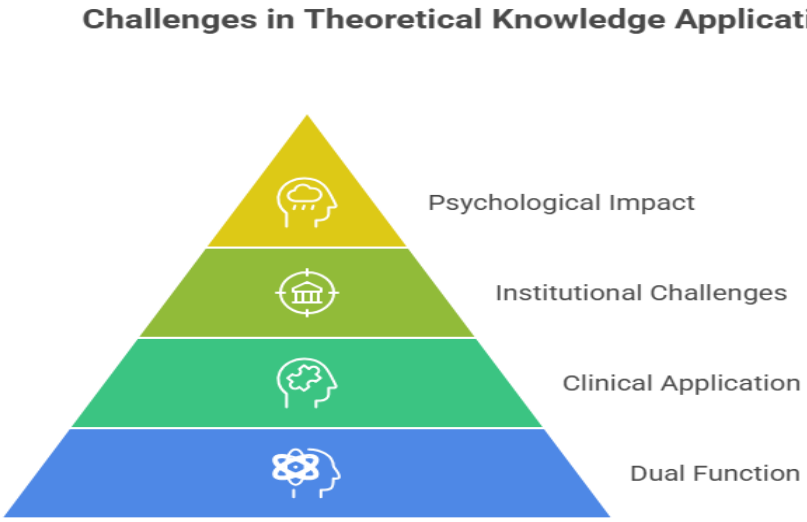
Ethical Consideration:

Ethical principles were strictly followed throughout the research process. Before data collection, formal permission was obtained from the concerned institutional authority to conduct the study. The purpose, objectives and procedures of the study were explained to the participants and written informed consent was obtained from all the participants before participation. The researchers made sure that participation was entirely voluntary and that participants knew they could withdraw from the study at any time, without penalty. To maintain confidentiality and

anonymity, the names or personal information of the research participants were concealed in the research report. All the data collected were secured and used for academic and research purposes only.

Data Analysis

Thematic Analysis:



Theme 1: Dual Function of Theoretical Knowledge

Students pursuing a bachelor's degree in nursing benefit from theoretical knowledge in two ways. On the one hand, it gives students the fundamental scientific and procedural knowledge required to carry out clinical tasks such medication preparation, IV cannulation, documentation, vital sign monitoring, and patient assessment. Students enter the clinical setting having a basic concept of what should be done and why because of their classroom knowledge. However, when theory is overly idealistic or abstract, pupils perceive it as constrained. Textbook concepts like nursing models and care theories may seem important in the classroom, but they can be challenging to implement at the bedside because staff expectations, ward procedures, and patient situations are frequently different from those in the classroom.

P2: I feel confident when I study the procedure in class because I know the steps, but the situation in the ward is not always the same as the book.

P3: Theory helps me understand what I should do, but sometimes I do not know how to use that theory with a real patient.

This conclusion is corroborated by recent research, which demonstrates that the theory-practice divide is still a major obstacle in nursing education. According to Daneshfar and Karimi Moonaghi (2025), nursing students frequently find it difficult to apply what they have learned in the classroom to actual clinical settings, which can lower their confidence and influence their ability to make decisions. In a similar vein, Hobenu, Adefuye, Naab, and Nyoni (2025) stressed that clinical training is essential for the development of problem-solving, decision-making, and critical thinking skills and that nursing education encompasses both theory and practice. In order to link classroom information with actual patient care, their review also found curricular scaffolding, simulation, and more effective clinical teaching techniques. These results provide credence to the notion that theory is helpful but only takes on significance when students are assisted in using it in real-world clinical settings.

To sum up, academic knowledge is a crucial basis for BS Nursing students, but it is not sufficient on its own. It gives pupils self-assurance and gets them ready for technical assignments, but if it isn't directly related to bedside realities, it could be confusing. Thus, in addition to teaching theory, nursing education should assist students in converting theoretical ideas into safe, useful, and patient-centered care.

Theme 2: Clinical Application

The challenges students have while attempting to apply what they have learned in the classroom to actual hospital settings are known as clinical application obstacles. When they start clinical practice, students frequently anticipate that circumstances would follow the structured procedures they have learned in lectures and skills labs. Clinical settings, however, are uncertain. Patients may exhibit signs of mental illness, anxiety, aggression, confusion, uncooperation, or medical instability. Students may struggle to apply theoretical information effectively in such circumstances. Confusion can also arise from variations in ward procedures, classroom teachings, and institutional policies. Additionally, students may witness staff members taking shortcuts, which may put pressure on them to put speed ahead of the safety precepts they have learned in class.

P1:We learn the proper procedures in class, but everyone in the ward is rushing, so I'm not sure if I should follow the staff or the book.

P4:Some patients do not respond the way we expect, and then I forget what I learned because I become nervous.

According to recent research, clinical practice is a challenging setting where students must learn to apply theoretical knowledge to actual patient care. Clinical experience exposes nursing students to emotional obstacles, patient pressures, mentor expectations, and environmental stress, but it also helps them gain confidence, skills, professional behavior, and decision-making, according to Cui et al. (2025). Additionally, Daneshfar and Karimi Moonaghi (2025) pointed out that students may feel anxious when they visit actual healthcare settings, particularly if they don't have organized opportunities to put theory into practice. These results reinforce the present topic by demonstrating that unpredictable patients, hectic ward cultures, and a lack of support during real-time decision-making all contribute to clinical hurdles.

In conclusion, nursing knowledge should become practical competence in the clinical setting, but this transfer is challenging due to a number of obstacles. Students' capacity to implement what they have learned may be weakened by patient behavior, ward pressure, communication gaps, and unofficial shortcuts. Hospitals and nursing homes can collaborate to offer clear expectations for safe practice, supportive ward settings, and organized clinical guidance in order to lower these obstacles**.**

Theme 3: Institutional Challenges

The structural flaws that impact students' clinical learning are described by issues with institutions and supervision. When teachers or senior staff are unavailable, overburdened, or uninterested in educating, students may feel unsupported. The amount of time staff nurses can devote to students is frequently constrained by their heavy clinical workload. Students' confidence and practical ability are sometimes diminished when they are allowed to watch rather than actively participate. Students may study one technique in the skills lab but come into various resources in the hospital due to differences between outdated ward equipment and new laboratory equipment.

P5: Sometimes we wait for guidance, but the staff are too busy, so we just watch instead of practicing.

P4: The equipment in our lab is different from the ward, and it becomes difficult to perform the procedure with confidence.

Recent studies provide compelling evidence for the significance of supervision. An ISBAR-based clinical supervision model enhanced nursing internship students' clinical self-efficacy, decision-making, and handover abilities, according to Gheisari et al. (2025). According to Bartoníčková et al. (2026), nursing students' patient safety, competence, confidence, and safety-oriented actions are all positively impacted by structured

and supportive supervision. Hobenu et al. (2025) also highlighted how corporate culture, educational methods, psychosocial contact, and physical resources all influence the therapeutic learning environment. These findings demonstrate that supervision is an essential tool for linking theory and practice rather than just an extra source of assistance.

In conclusion, in order to help BS Nursing students become skilled practitioners, institutional support and efficient supervision are crucial. Students may suffer from uncertainty, low self-esteem, and reality shock when supervision is inadequate. The relationship between theoretical learning and clinical performance can be strengthened by strong collaboration between nursing schools and hospitals, sufficient instructor availability, current resources, and organized feedback.

Theme 4: Psychological Impact

BS Nursing students are directly impacted psychologically by the discrepancy between theory and practice. The real clinical setting might cause worry, anxiety, and self-doubt, even when theory could initially give confidence. Students may be concerned about hurting patients, making mistakes, receiving negative feedback from professionals, or performing operations incorrectly. When students receive conflicting information, such as being instructed to follow standard protocols in class but learning in the ward that those processes are "only for theory," this emotional pressure intensifies. Students may become less motivated and doubt their own abilities as a result of this dissonance.

P2:I know the procedure in my mind, but when I stand near the patient, I feel afraid that I may harm them.

P3:I feel confused and lose confidence when staff say the textbook method is not used here.

Nursing students face emotional difficulties during clinical practice, according to recent research. Reality shock, according to Cui et al. (2025), is an emotional and psychological response that happens when clinical reality deviates from students' expectations, resulting in stress, perplexity, and anxiety. Additionally, their study demonstrated how students' psychological health may be impacted by pressures from mentors, patients, coworkers, and the clinical setting. According to Daneshfar and Karimi Moonaghi (2025), having trouble putting theory into practice might lower confidence and have an impact on decision-making. Furthermore, Bartoníčková et al. (2026) discovered that psychologically safe supervision is crucial since students' emotional experiences affect their self-assurance in speaking up and acting responsibly**.**

In conclusion, the theory-practice gap affects students emotionally in addition to being an academic or clinical problem. Learning and patient care can be impacted by fear, low self-esteem, confusion, and a reduction in motivation. To help students manage anxiety and build professional confidence, nursing programs should incorporate emotional preparation, reflective discussion, mentorship, simulation, and supportive supervision.

Discussion

The results of this study show that there is a significant disconnect between academic knowledge and clinical practice for BS Nursing students. The four themes—clinical application hurdles, institutional and supervision challenges, psychological ramifications, and the dual role of theoretical knowledge—indicate that although students like classroom instruction, they frequently face challenges in the actual clinical setting. Although theory gives students fundamental knowledge, self-assurance, and technical comprehension, the clinical environment exposes them to unpredictable patients, ward pressure, little resources, and uneven supervision. The theory-practice divide is a persistent difficulty in training students for competent and safe clinical care, according to recent nursing education literature (Daneshfar & Karimi Moonaghi, 2025; Hobenu et al., 2025). According to the 2025 systematic review by Daneshfar and Karimi Moonaghi, nursing students frequently find it difficult to apply what they learn in the classroom to actual clinical

settings, which can undermine their confidence and influence their ability to make decisions.

According to the first topic, "theoretical knowledge's twofold function," theory can be both a help and a hindrance. Students stated that they were better able to comprehend standardized procedures such patient assessment, IV cannulation, paperwork, and vital signs thanks to classroom instruction. This result is in line with that of Altunsoy and Dag (2025), who discovered that nursing students' clinical practice competency and classroom patient safety knowledge were crucial for training them for safe treatment. However, the same theme also demonstrates that when students attempt to apply nursing theories or textbook-based processes in difficult clinical realities, theoretical knowledge may appear abstract. According to Hobenu et al. (2025), clinical education fosters critical thinking, problem-solving, and decision-making abilities, whereas nursing education necessitates both theory and practice.

The challenges students encounter when theory and actual patient care collide are highlighted in the second theme, clinical application barriers. Although the clinical context frequently involves combative patients, psychiatric symptoms, communication issues, staff shortages, and pressure to do work quickly, students may learn a perfect procedure in class. Cui et al. (2025), who discovered that clinical practice exposes nursing students to emotional difficulties, cognitive shifts, and professional adjustment when they transition from classroom instruction into actual patient care, corroborate this conclusion. In a similar vein, Lee et al. (2025) demonstrated that patient safety education must teach students how to recognize and handle actual clinical risks rather than just memorizing concepts. These results imply that students require more than just theoretical training; they also require safe opportunities to practice making decisions, guided reflection, and frequent exposure to genuine clinical circumstances.

The third element, institutional and supervision difficulties , demonstrates that the theory-practice gap is both an institutional and a student issue. When clinical teachers are not available, senior personnel are overworked, ward equipment is different from laboratory equipment, and there is poor communication between academic and clinical settings, students' learning is impacted. This is in line with the findings of Bartoníčková et al. (2026), who found that nursing students' confidence, competence, and patient-safety-oriented behavior are enhanced by structured and psychologically secure supervision. In order to facilitate translation into safe practice, Lu et al. (2026) also discovered that patient safety education has to be standardized throughout the nursing curriculum and provided using a variety of instructional techniques. In order to improve clinical learning and lessen confusion, nursing colleges and hospitals must work together institutionally.

The theory-practice gap impacts pupils both intellectually and emotionally, as the fourth subject, psychological ramifications for students , illustrates. Although students may approach clinical practice with theoretical assurance, when ward procedures diverge from what is taught in textbooks, real patient care can cause worry, poor self-confidence, fear of hurting patients, and perplexity. According to Han et al. (2025), students' role transition is supported by clinical competence and resilience, but it is adversely affected by anxiety during clinical practice. Additionally, Cui et al. (2025) reported reality shock in nursing students, demonstrating how clinical practice can cause emotional and cognitive shifts when students face demands from the real world. These results corroborate the study's conclusion that guided supervision, mentoring, and psychological support are essential for assisting students in developing their professional identities and self-assurance.

The talk also highlights the significance of simulation-based learning. By giving students the opportunity to practice procedures, communication, clinical judgment, and patient safety skills in a safe setting before interacting with actual patients, simulation can help close the gap between classroom learning and bedside treatment. Simulation-based education can

enhance clinical competence, decision-making, confidence, and information transfer, according to Daneshfar and Karimi Moonaghi (2025). Additionally, Lee et al. (2025) showed how simulation exercises like the "Room of Horrors" might assist students in identifying patient safety risks and making the connection between safety knowledge and clinical practice. This implies that simulation should be used in BS Nursing programs as a link between theory and the actual clinical setting rather than as a substitute for clinical practice.

Overall, current data from 2025 and 2026 provides good support for the study's findings. A number of factors, including abstract classroom instruction, unpredictable clinical realities, inadequate supervision, institutional constraints, and emotional stress, seem to contribute to the theory-practice gap. Students require current clinical materials, supporting supervision, simulation-based practice, psychological preparation, and integrated teaching methodologies that link theory to actual patient situations. In order to assist students in converting theoretical knowledge into safe and competent nursing practice, nursing schools should improve faculty-clinical site collaboration, establish clinical expectations, train clinical supervisors, and offer structured feedback.

Conclusion:

The conclusion of this study was that BS Nursing students had great challenges in balancing nursing theory and clinical practice. Theoretical knowledge is essential in understanding nursing concepts, procedures, documentation, patient assessment and clinical decision-making. However, students often struggle to apply theoretical knowledge to real hospital situations. The findings indicate that theory gives students a foundation of confidence and technical preparedness, however, clinical reality is often more complex, unpredictable and demanding than classroom learning.The study revealed several barriers to clinical application such as unpredictable behavior of the patient, communication gaps between academic and clinical settings, differences between textbook procedures and ward routines, and pressure to follow shortcuts in busy clinical environments. These challenges confuse students and make it difficult for them to apply consistently what they are being taught in class. This can leave students struggling to make the connection between theory and safe and effective patient care."

Institutional and supervisory factors were also identified as key factors contributing to the theory-practice gap. The limited availability of instructors, heavy clinical staff workload, lack of interest in teaching, inadequate supervision and differences between laboratory and hospital resources negatively affect students' learning experiences. Without appropriate guidance and feedback, students may feel unsupported and unable to develop the confidence and competence required for professional nursing practice. Moreover, the gap between theory and practice has psychological effects on students. Students often report feeling afraid, unsure, anxious, confused, and worried about harming patients. Students may feel dissonance and reduced motivation when they perceive discrepancies between classroom learning and clinical practice. Thus, the theory–practice gap is not only an educational issue but also an emotional and professional challenge for nursing students. The study generally indicates the need for more integration between classroom teaching and clinical learning. Nursing schools should work more closely with hospitals, offer formal clinical supervision, keep resources up to date, improve simulation-based learning, and develop supportive environments for students to apply theory to practice in a safe manner. Addressing these challenges will help nursing education in preparing BS Nursing students to become confident, competent and patient-centered professionals.

Recommendations

- There is a significant necessity to enhance cooperation between educational institutions and clinical environments. Regular communication, joint planning, and shared goals between faculty and hospital staff can help make sure that what

students learn in the classroom is the same as what they do in the clinical setting.

- Supervision in the clinic needs to be improved. During their clinical rotations, students learn a lot from teachers who are supportive, available, and interested in what they are doing. Hospitals and other organizations should make sure that clinical instructors aren't too busy and have enough time to properly mentor and guide students.

- Make sure that the way you teach is in line with how things work in the real world. Simulation-based learning is helpful, but it should be set up to look like real ward conditions, such as having few resources and being under time pressure. This will help students be better ready for real-life clinical problems.

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