Faculty Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion for Excellence in Nurse Education: A Literature Review

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Abstract

Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in faculty composition are critical to fostering excellence in nurse education. As the nursing profession evolves to meet the needs of increasingly diverse patient populations, the role of diverse faculty in shaping culturally competent, inclusive, and equitable education becomes essential. This literature review examines the significance of DEI in nursing faculty recruitment, retention, and pedagogical approaches. It explores the impact of faculty diversity on student learning outcomes, educational excellence, and the broader nursing workforce. The review highlights systemic barriers to DEI, including implicit bias, institutional policies, and structural inequities, while also discussing evidence-based strategies to promote inclusivity, such as mentorship programs, policy reforms, and culturally responsive teaching. By analyzing current literature, this paper underscores the need for a proactive commitment to DEI in nursing academia to enhance faculty representation, improve student engagement, and ultimately contribute to health equity. The findings emphasize that a diverse nursing faculty is not only a moral and ethical imperative but also a strategic necessity for advancing nursing education and healthcare delivery.

Keywords: *Faculty diversity, equity, inclusion, nurse education, cultural competence, health equity, nursing faculty recruitment, pedagogical inclusivity, faculty retention, nursing workforce, institutional policies.*

1.Introduction

The Growing Need for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Nursing Education

The global population is undergoing an unprecedented demographic shift, with societies becoming increasingly multicultural and diverse. This transformation brings forth a crucial challenge for healthcare systems: ensuring equitable access to quality care for all individuals, regardless of their race, ethnicity, socioeconomic background, or cultural identity. Unfortunately, disparities in healthcare remain pervasive, disproportionately affecting minority communities that have historically faced systemic disadvantages. Underrepresented populations continue to experience disparities in healthcare access, patient outcomes, and quality of treatment, which underscores the urgency of addressing these inequalities. To bridge this gap, healthcare professionals particularly nurses must be equipped with the knowledge, skills, and cultural competencies necessary to deliver patient-centered care that acknowledges and respects diverse backgrounds(1).

In response to these disparities, diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives have emerged as critical components in shaping a more inclusive and effective nursing workforce. The American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) has emphasized the importance of integrating DEI principles into nursing education, advocating for the development of culturally competent nurses who can address the unique needs of various patient populations. DEI is not merely an abstract concept; rather, it encompasses concrete strategies aimed at fostering an inclusive academic and clinical environment where all individuals regardless of race, gender, socioeconomic status, or cultural background can thrive(2). To ensure that future nurses possess the ability to navigate diverse healthcare settings effectively, nurse educators play a fundamental role in embedding DEI concepts within the curriculum, institutional policies, and faculty hiring processes.

The Role of Nurse Educators in Advancing DEI Efforts

Nurse educators serve as the driving force behind efforts to instill DEI principles in the next generation of nurses. They act as mentors, role models, and advocates for fostering an academic culture that values diversity. Their responsibility extends beyond teaching clinical skills and theoretical knowledge; they must also prepare students to engage in culturally responsive care and understand the societal factors that contribute to health disparities. In nursing programs,

educators are uniquely positioned to influence students' perspectives, challenging biases and promoting empathy, critical thinking, and advocacy for underrepresented groups(3).

However, despite the growing emphasis on DEI, the lack of diversity within nursing faculty remains a significant concern. According to recent statistics, only 18% of full-time nurse educators in the United States belong to underrepresented minority groups, despite the increasing diversity of the student population. In Illinois, for example, minority students make up 31.3% of the nursing student body, yet only 20.1% of nursing faculty members belong to minority groups. This discrepancy highlights a critical issue: the faculty responsible for shaping the future of nursing does not adequately reflect the diversity of the student population or the communities they serve. A diverse faculty not only enriches the academic experience by bringing different cultural perspectives into the learning environment but also serves as an inspiration for minority students, helping them feel represented, supported, and encouraged to pursue leadership roles in healthcare.

Bridging the Gap: The Need for Institutional Commitment

To address these disparities, academic institutions must adopt a comprehensive, multi-faceted approach to DEI in nursing education. This involves more than just increasing student diversity it requires a systemic shift in faculty recruitment, curriculum development, institutional policies, and leadership commitment(4). One of the key recommendations from DEI research is that nursing programs should actively seek to recruit and retain faculty from diverse backgrounds, ensuring that educators reflect the multicultural nature of the student body and patient populations. Additionally, institutions must go beyond surface-level diversity initiatives by embedding DEI values into their core mission, making them an integral part of institutional identity rather than optional add-ons.

A crucial first step is the development of strategic DEI-focused policies that foster an inclusive academic environment. These policies should outline measurable goals, such as increasing faculty diversity, incorporating DEI topics into nursing curricula, and implementing mentorship programs for underrepresented minority educators and students. Furthermore, institutions must ensure that faculty members receive proper training in cultural competency, bias awareness, and inclusive teaching practices. It is not enough to simply hire diverse faculty nursing schools must actively support and retain them through mentorship, leadership development programs, and recognition of their contributions to DEI efforts.

Objectives of This Literature Review

This paper aims to provide a comprehensive literature review on the significance of DEI in nursing education, offering insights into the most effective strategies for fostering faculty diversity and inclusivity. By examining existing research and best practices, this study will highlight the key actions institutions can take to promote DEI within nursing programs, improve faculty representation, and enhance the overall quality of nursing education.

2.Methods

Ethical Considerations and Institutional Review Board Approval

The Institution Review Board at Lewis University authorized this literature review through gaining ethical approval beforehand. Academic research that investigates DEI in nursing education requires ethical oversight for its studies. The IRB exists to review and ensure research methodologies implement existing ethical standards which mandate protection of participant confidentiality while promoting data responsibility and free unhindered data selection and analysis. Since the research involved literature synthesis instead of human subjects the study needed IRB approval to guarantee ethical research practices and academic standards.

Logistical approval shows institutions we maintain essential standards which the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) and the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) have established. The organizations establish that researchers must conduct DEI investigations with equality as well as impartiality and cultural sensitivity. The review process maintained bias reduction techniques which confirmed that article selection and analysis proceeded through academic assessment of merit while staying pertinent to the research goals(5).

Literature Search Strategy and Data Collection

This research used a methodical database search in the academic platforms Primo along with ProQuest and Google Scholar and Mendeley. The databases were selected based on their wide scholarly publication indexing which covers nursing education as well as healthcare diversity and DEI best practice resources. A comprehensive and methodologically sound research design was implemented for identifying both relevant studies and high-quality material in an inclusive manner during the search procedure.

The search strategy employed 15 specific keywords together with various search phrases to obtain a wide yet specific selection of literature. These keywords included:

- Cultural competency in nursing education
- Diversity in nursing faculty recruitment
- Standards of equity together with inclusion dominate nursing school environments
- Healthcare education implements teaching techniques that promote inclusivity toward students from diverse backgrounds.
- Holistic admissions in nursing programs
- Impact of faculty diversity on student outcomes
- The provision of mentorship programs directly targets nursing educators who come from underrepresented minority backgrounds
- Educational institutions should implement various methods to advance DEI goals.

Research queries were built with Boolean terms (AND, OR, NOT) in order to achieve specific search result filtration. Two example searches for the research focus included "nursing faculty diversity AND student success" and "DEI initiatives OR inclusive curriculum in nursing" to retrieve specific articles. Studies published prior to 2018 and non-peer-reviewed materials were eliminated during filtering in order to include only contemporary academic research of high standard.

Criteria for Inclusion and Exclusion

A set of decision-making criteria separated the 61 articles that satisfied the search from additional articles that failed to meet the requirements. The research included only peer-reviewed journal articles and systematic reviews as well as empirical studies together with official reports from established nursing organizations. Articles were required to:

- The research articles used for this study belong to the time period between 2018–2023 to incorporate the most current findings.
- HEE institutions need to make DEI a central component within their nursing programs while selecting new faculty members and evaluating the success of healthcare trainees.
- The research includes evidence from experiments or has theoretical foundations which expand our comprehension of exemplary DEI application.
- All studies need to use English language to achieve a standardized analysis.
- All sources must circle from academic publishers as well as professional nursing associations and government agencies.
- Studies received exclusion if the authors met any of the following conditions:
- Research concentrated on diversity in healthcare settings independently from nursing education recruitment of faculty.
- Scientific weaknesses throughout the studies included inadequate control groups with small sample sizes and insufficient research data that failed to substantiate findings.

The selected dataset contained 26 peer-reviewed articles and authoritative reports about effective DEI strategies in nursing education that passed the application of these selection criteria.

Framework for Evaluating Evidence Quality

Melnyk and Fineout-Overholt's (2023) Levels of Evidence framework was used to assess each chosen article and ensure that only scientifically valid research entered this review. The research investigation uses a hierarchical system to evaluate studies which establishes their methodological strength as well as research reliability. The framework includes:

The most trustworthy research evidence includes systematic reviews and meta-analyses and randomized controlled trials (RCTs) belonging to Level I.

Level II: Well-designed cohort studies.

Level III: Case-control studies.

The evidence category includes Level IV research with observational studies and cross-sectional research and qualitative studies(6).

The evidence pool at Level V contains expert opinions together with case reports and non-peer-reviewed studies.

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This study focused its selection mainly on Level I and Level II evidence because studies within these groups have the most reliable findings. The study included qualitative studies at Level IV as long as these studies revealed important findings related to thesnapshot perspective of minority student and faculty lived experiences.

Data Extraction and Thematic Analysis

Different themes emerged from the findings through a thematic analysis method that outlined typical trends and challenges and successful approaches for advancing DEI education within nursing. The researchers analyzed each selected article deeply to formulate common patterns that organized under these main dimensions:

Recruitment and retention of diverse nursing faculty.

- Integration of DEI principles into institutional mission statements.
- Nursing schools should adopt the development of training programs and educational curricula that embrace inclusiveness.
- The implementation of diversity and inclusion initiatives receive backing from institutional leaders while utilizing leadership positions.
- Impact of mentorship and professional development on faculty diversity.
- Data-driven decision-making for tracking DEI progress.
- The analyst utilized NVivo software for thematic analysis to generate systematic codes which organized the prominent findings from multiple research studies. The systematic process allowed researchers to detect and analyze relationships within DEI approaches to develop practical suggestions.

3.Results

Overview of Findings

The 26 peer-reviewed articles as well as authoritative reports generated a group of essential themes which define current best practices for enhancing diversity equity and inclusion (DEI) standards in nursing education. The results emphasize the need to enhance faculty diversity while placing DEI into mission statements and teach inclusive nursing concepts as well as showing increased leadership dedication to DEI and establishing data-driven tracking systems for decision-making progress. Long-term sustainability of DEI-focused reforms became achievable through strategically implemented mentorship programs and policy reforms and community outreach efforts(7).

Research across different studies demonstrated a clear relationship where institutions devoted to active DEI initiatives achieved better outcomes regarding student engagement as well as faculty contentment and institutional open inclusion. Studies identified multiple ongoing obstacles that hinder DEI progress which include institutional staff reluctance to transform practices alongside funding shortages for DEI initiatives and unidentified biases that appear throughout hiring and promotion systems. Multiple levels of intervention must bring changes to policies alongside educator development programs and continuous institutional responsibility to overcome mentioned obstacles.

Faculty Recruitment and Retention: Addressing the Underrepresentation of Minority Nursing Educators

Research demonstrates how essential it is to build more underrepresented minority (URM) nursing faculty member positions and maintain their continued employment. Nursing education faces a major challenge because student demographic percentages significantly differ from those of the faculty. Nursing students representing minorities form 31.3% of the student body yet underrepresented full-time nurse educators fall to just 18% of educators. The low representation of faculty who resemble minority students represents a problem because these students experience diminished sense of belonging and lowered professional advancement motivation.

Multiple successful methods exist for increasing faculty diversity according to literature sources. These include:

The strategic hiring process for diverse faculty members includes direct outreach to Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) together with Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs) and Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs).

An improved hiring system should assess candidates with lived experiences combined with cultural competency and education-based DEI commitments instead of just their academic backgrounds.

The implementation of support programs must match new URM faculty members with senior mentors who will guide their professional career and provide supportive advocacy.

Retention-focused policies, such as equitable promotion criteria, competitive salaries, and institutional recognition of DEI contributions in performance evaluations.

Institutional Mission Statements and DEI Commitments

Multiple studies show that higher education institutions must integrate DEI at their core institutional priorities. Programs which promote diversity alongside inclusion through their stated missions will produce diverse applications from students and faculty candidates. DEI-oriented institutions which have clearly established goals demonstrate better ability to construct comprehensive and sustainable inclusion-oriented strategic development plans.

A mission statement that adds DEI language is insufficient to address diversity and inclusion needs effectively. Tooth earns the most remarkable results in the field when institutions move beyond mere statements to create structured plans with dedicated leaders for DEI advocacy along with financial backing for such initiatives. Different university entities have formed DEI task forces which monitor faculty recruitment processes while leading educational content transformations and providing systemic cultural training for the entire university community.

Curriculum Development: Integrating DEI into Nursing Education

Education plays a vital role through nursing curriculum development because it teaches students about diversity education awareness and competency. Nursing programs established with inclusive curricular elements produce graduates able to provide effective culturally sensitive care resulting in better healthcare results across various ethnic associations.

Effective curriculum-based DEI strategies include:

Educational institutions should teach cultural competency techniques across their main nursing education classes to help students understand implicit biases alongside health inequalities along with social health factors.

Educational experiential learning includes patient encounters through rotations within communities serving underrepresented areas that let students practice with diverse healthcare groups.

The implementation of classroom discussions about DEI content should include training on healthcare ethics alongside discussions about medical history and patient group advocacy approaches for marginalized patients(8).

Schools should create specialized educational programs including licensure programs and electives dedicated to DEI which allow students to concentrate in areas of health equity and minority health advocacy along with global health.

The literature revealed students who studied DEI received more confidence when delivering culturally sensitive healthcare. Student satisfaction and engagement at nursing programs rose when DEI-infused curricula replaced traditional teaching methods which demonstrated no similar integration.

Leadership Commitment and Institutional Support for DEI Initiatives

Academic leadership plays an essential role in creating proper academic environments for inclusiveness. Institutional leadership that makes DEI initiatives central to their mission leads institutions to achieve better results in cultivating equitable learning along with working environments. Leadership support for DEI initiatives becomes apparent when they enforce diversity policies and provide training programs and allocate funds for diversity-related projects.

The most powerful approaches to promote DEI through leadership consist of the following elements:

Educational institutions should establish dedicated positions and offices for DEI leadership with both Chief Diversity Officers and DEI Committees who will direct institutional diversity initiatives.

Every member of the institution should undergo DEI training so that each educational space obtains the capability to foster inclusion.

Staff in hiring committees should undergo bias-awareness training to prevent discrimination throughout recruitment and promotion procedures.

The institution should establish awards and achievement incentives to honor faculty who embrace DEI initiatives.

Data-Driven Approaches to DEI Implementation

- The literature demonstrated that gathering and analyzing data serves as a crucial factor for determining the accomplishment of DEI initiatives. Institutions that track diversity statistics can use collected data to make better decisions about resource allocation and strategy improvements for DEI efforts.
- The following conditions serve as effective best practices for achieving data-driven DEI implementation:
- The institute should perform surveys about its institutional climate to measure faculty/staff and student perceptions regarding inclusiveness which will help identify needed improvements.
- To determine how well diversity-focused hiring initiatives succeed the institution utilizes research on faculty recruitment and retention patterns.

- The implementation of equity scorecards along with performance metrics measures both student success and faculty satisfaction outcomes from DEI policy implementation.
- The organization must issue yearly DEI progress reports that provide both openness and institutional responsibility.

4.Discussion

Principal Findings: The State of DEI in Nursing Education

This review shows multiple vital discoveries about the advancements as well as obstacles encountered during DEI implementation in nursing education curriculums. Structural minorities are drastically underrepresented in nursing faculty positions which acts as the main hurdle to create an inclusive educational environment. The United States reports an 18% full-time nurse educator minority representation rate although minority nursing students make up 31.3% of the student population. The lack of diversity among faculty educators emphasizes an urgent requirement to establish hiring and retention policies which support complete faculty diversity.

The analysis proved that developing DEI-focused curricula stands as a vital component for creating competent nurses who deliver excellence in various healthcare environments. Nursing programs that teach students about cultural competency and both health equity and implicit bias training develop professionals competent in diverse healthcare practices(9). Higher levels of student engagement and better retention along with elevated satisfaction connect to institutions which adopt whole-student learning methods combined with practical training experiences and community-focused clinical training.

An institution achieves sustainable DEI initiatives through active leadership at all levels. Universities achieving better academic inclusivity exhibit greater effectiveness when they establish DEI principles in mission statements and structure leadership teams for inclusivity and form concrete DEI committees. The study shows DEI needs active institutional backing rather than being pursued independently by nursing departments alone.

Challenges in Implementing DEI Initiatives

Forward movement regarding DEI in nursing education remains uneven due to multiple obstacles that block complete adoption. The main problem in DEI implementation stems from faculty and leadership resistance to modifications although these groups don't fully understand the value of diversity initiatives. Educators at different levels show resistance to DEI initiatives because they believe these efforts should not interfere with sharpening clinical abilities. Universities need to show why diversity education directly leads to better healthcare results including ensemble demands and employee representation in healthcare staff(10).

Institutional funding for DEI programs appears to be insufficient as a major obstacle to their implementation. The absence of adequate financial support prevents universities from implementing multi-scale curriculum changes or professional development programs for diverse faculty members plus mentorship programs. Organizations struggle to maintain DEI progress when they lack continuous budgetary resources since their DEI efforts become isolated and unstrategic instead of forming a fundamental part of nursing education programs. Long-term financial support from institutions will enable DEI initiatives to continue effectively by safeguarding their continuity.

The hiring and promotion processes are adversely affected by implicit prejudice. Academic hiring systems focus on research accomplishments and clinical history instead of factors such as personal background or diversity and equality contributions and cultural ability. Many qualified minority candidates lose out in selection processes because hiring teams place more value on traditional academic achievements instead of different professional experiences. The barriers for faculty recruitment can be solved by employing holistic hiring methods along with session-based training for hiring panels while building formal mentoring structures.

Best Practices for Advancing DEI in Nursing Education

Numerous effective methods emerge from this research to develop DEI practices in nursing education. The main solution for diverse faculty development exists in active recruitment measures paired with strategies for faculty retention(11). Universities can achieve this by:

Universities should make hiring outreach efforts directly to minority communities by establishing partnerships with HBCUs Hispanic-Serving Institutions and Tribal Colleges and Universities.

The hiring process should judge applicants thoroughly by examining their cultural skills along with dedication to diversity equity inclusion and their aptitude to mentor different student groups instead of merely regarding research background.

Professional guidance and career advancement together with leadership training should be delivered through structured mentoring programs to minority faculty members.

Educational institutions need standardized promotion tracks which value faculty efforts to advance DEI as equivalent to research excellence.

Implications for Future Research and Policy Development

The extensive review of DEI nursing education research demands additional investigations into how long-term DEI implementations affect both faculty member longevity and student success and health workforce variables. Future studies should examine:

The research evaluates mentorship programs created for minority faculty who are underrepresented and how these programs affect their continued work with the organization.

Student diversity initiatives create positive impacts on minority student academic results and graduation achievements and access to professional progression opportunities.

The medical outcomes of patient treatment would be assessed by DEI-based educational programs that serve populations experiencing healthcare disparities.

DEI policies need to stay consistent with hiring and promotion frameworks to achieve substantial faculty diversity growth throughout time.

Nursing education institutions must establish concrete policies which make DEI an essential component of educational standards. The requirement for cultural proficiency training must be compulsory through national nursing licensing boards for both certification and continuing education purposes. All nurses with different levels of education should participate in standardized health equity and cultural competency training to achieve competency.

5. Conclusion and Future work

The ethical conduct of increasing diversity equity and inclusion in nursing programs becomes fundamental to strategic patient care improvement and both learning environment inclusiveness alongside professional access equity. Academic nursing programs have made progressive changes to integrate diversity equity and inclusion elements yet substantial weaknesses persist mainly within the areas of faculty diversity alongside curriculum openness and lack of institutional support programs. The scarcity of minority faculty members in nursing education creates a significant problem which leads to limited perspective diversity while providing insufficient guidance to understated students. A dissipation of ethnic imbalance in nursing education necessitates various strategic interventions starting with purposeful recruiting mechanisms and adding sustained employment supports and hiring processes that maintain cultural expertise along with standard academic accomplishments. Mentorship programs and faculty development initiatives and leadership-driven DEI strategies should be established to support minority educators who aim to thrive in academic institutions permanently. To achieve DEI excellence the implementation of DEI principles becomes essential within nursing educational programs alongside faculty hiring activities. The development of a culturally competent nursing workforce depends on educational programs offering complete training about health disparities combined with implicit bias training and fair patient care methods. Experiential approaches to learning that include training at local healthcare settings and educational meetings about diversity and equity enhance student interest and prepare new nurses to offer respect-based care to diverse patient groups in medical facilities. Institutional success in diversity equity and inclusion initiatives depends on academic leadership since university leadership that supports DEI through mission declarations and funded programs achieves superior results in faculty diversity and student inclusiveness. Systematic obstacles made up of organizational change opposition alongside insufficient budget support and hidden hiring and promotional preference gaps maintain widespread barriers to DEI practice adoption. Future research in this domain needs to conduct extended investigations about how DEI-oriented policy frameworks affect faculty maintainment levels together with student academic success rates and healthcare staffing composition. New investigations need to study the effects of mentoring coupled with faculty development initiatives on the professional paths of minority nursing professors who are underrepresented. Educational institutions need to create systematic evaluation methods which use data to monitor how well their diversity strategies improve faculty makeup and achievements while enhancing student success along with healthcare delivery results. To achieve national standards in nursing practice all nurses should participate in diversity-equality-inclusion training as a necessary condition for both certification completion and continuing

professional development according to licensing boards and national nursing accreditation bodies. The future development of DEI in nursing education depends on devoted institutional backing alongside creative policy transformations and an organizational environment which places diversity at the core of academic achievement and professional growth. Nursing programs which adopt a system-wide approach to diversity equity and inclusion will develop workforce professionals who perform dual functions of demographic representation and healthcare equity advocacy leading to improved treatment access and social justice in medical settings. Establishing DEI practices demands continuous input among academic institutions together with healthcare organizations alongside policymakers and professional nursing associations to prepare nurses who will affect healthcare equity worldwide through cultural competence and empathic advocacy.

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Conflicts of interest

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare

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