

Developing as a person: How international educational programs transform nurses and midwives

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ABSTRACT

Objective: To determine impact of undertaking an international educational program during a nurse's or midwife's pre-registration program on subsequent practice, focusing on how nurses and midwives were transformed personally through participation in such programs.

Background: Participation in international educational programs has been reported to enhance nursing and midwifery students' personal and professional development, however long-term impacts remain unclear. This paper presents findings drawn from a larger grounded theory study.

Study design and Methods: Charmaz's grounded theory methodology was used to elicit experiences from 13 general nurses, two mental health nurses, three midwives and four dual qualified nurse/midwives across eight different countries. Data analysis led to the creation of three categories, with this paper reporting on the category of *Developing as a Person*.

Findings: Participation in international educational programs can be transformative for nurses and midwives with long-lasting impacts, contributing positively to their personal growth and development.

Discussion: The study findings underscore significant long-term impacts of international educational programs for nurses and midwives. These outcomes highlight the importance of incorporating international experiences into healthcare education.

Conclusion: By providing opportunities for healthcare professionals to engage with diverse settings and populations, organisations and educational institutions can foster the development of well-rounded and globally competent practitioners.

Implications for research, policy, and practice:

The study's findings hold significant implications for research, policy, and practice in healthcare education. To deepen our understandings, additional longitudinal research across diverse countries is warranted. Policymakers have an opportunity to acknowledge the positive impact of these programs on the personal growth and development of nurses and midwives, potentially leading to the integration of global competency requirements into licensure programs. In order to provide comprehensive education, educational institutions should consider the inclusion of study abroad opportunities, cultural exchanges, and global clinical placements within nursing and midwifery curricula.

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What is already known about the topic?

- International educational programs are widely used as a way of developing nursing and midwifery students' cultural understandings.
- Previous studies have reported on short-term impacts of international educational programs.

What this paper adds:

- Long-term impacts of participation in an international educational program on nurses and midwives are described.

- Personal development and subsequent transformations occur for nurses and midwives as a result of participation in international educational programs.

Keywords international educational program, global learning, grounded theory, midwife, nurse, transformative learning

INTRODUCTION

For the purpose of this study, the term 'international educational program' is adopted as the overarching descriptor for all types of international programs catering to nursing and midwifery students and includes international clinical placements, exchanges, service learning and short-term programs. International education programs have been used in higher education curricula for many years to immerse participants in different cultures, explore different professional contexts, and gain cultural awareness, cultural humility and global citizenship attributes.^{1,2} Particular to nursing and midwifery, research has reported short-term benefits of participation in these programs during a nurse's or midwife's pre-registration education including increased confidence, challenging own beliefs and personal growth.²⁻⁵ However, recent reviews indicate that most existing research reports short-term outcomes and identified a need to investigate long-term outcomes on students' personal development and future professional practice.^{3,5}

BACKGROUND

Nursing and midwifery education is pivotal in preparing students for future practice, requiring them to be personally and professionally competent and ready to care for increasingly multicultural and global patient populations⁶. Transformative learning experiences in different cultures may expedite this process and can have long lasting benefits related to non-technical skills important for nursing and midwifery practice, such as resilience, confidence, and empathy. Transformative learning is described by founding theorist Mezirow as "a disorienting dilemma that begins the process of transformation".^{7(p168)} It can result from experiences that challenge the individual to understand different cultures that contradict and challenge current ways of thinking, requiring new ways to approach or resolve situations.⁷⁻¹⁰ Transformative learning is important in nursing and midwifery education as it encourages students to examine commonly held beliefs of health care professionals, including organisational policies and

procedures, learning how to challenge traditions and conventions and advocating for diverse and marginalised communities.¹⁰ Critical reflection is a core element of transformative learning and involves critical review of one's beliefs and perceptions, where learners must experience change in ways of thinking.^{9,11} 'Disorientating dilemmas', as described by Mezirow,⁷ may arise from international cultural experiences, such as study abroad, service-learning programs or exchange programs within nursing and midwifery undergraduate curricula,¹² where participants may experience different health care systems,¹³ have clinical experience in low-resourced countries,¹⁴ experience language barriers and have exposure to different cultures and environments.¹⁵⁻¹⁷ These experiences may begin the process of transformative learning.¹⁸ Students who participate in international education programs should be supported with critical reflection and given opportunities to gain new perspectives and arouse their social consciousness.¹⁹⁻²¹ Walters et al believe participation in international educational programs would better prepare students to deliver health care more effectively to diverse patient populations, with the likelihood that they become leaders in patient advocacy and healthcare when they are nurses.⁹ Past studies on international education programs for nursing and midwifery have mostly focused on students' viewpoints, and many of them only examined short-term effects.²²⁻²⁵ Few studies have explored and reported on long-term outcomes,³ highlighting the gap in the literature. The current study addressed this gap in the literature and aimed to determine the impact of an international educational program during a nurse's or midwife's pre-registration program on their subsequent nursing and/or midwifery practice. By exploring how these programs impact on the subsequent nursing and midwifery practice of participants, this current study provides insight into lasting effects of such programs on personal development.

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METHODS

This paper reports nurses' and midwives' personal transformation through participation in international educational programs. It forms part of a larger study aiming to explore how undertaking international mobility in a nurse or midwife's pre-registration program impacts on their subsequent practice. Grounded theory methodology with a constructivist approach was employed to explore processes and influences of undertaking such programs during nurses' and midwives' pre-registration education on their later professional practice. Informed by Charmaz and underpinned by symbolic interactionism, the design enabled the researcher and participants to work together to construct meanings.^{26,27}

DATA COLLECTION

Following ethics approval (HEC 20053) from La Trobe University Human Research Ethics Committee, data were collected through semi-structured interviews. Purposive sampling was used to recruit participants through advertisement on LinkedIn and Facebook nursing and midwifery groups, followed by snowball sampling.²⁸ Potential participants expressed interest by directly contacting the researcher. The absence of coercion was evident in the voluntary nature of participants' engagement with the study and no participant was known to the researcher prior to the interview. Eligibility criteria required participants to be nurses and/or midwives who had participated in an international educational program during their pre-registration degree and who had completed at least one year of practice. Participants were recruited from eight countries: Australia, England, Scotland, Sweden, Canada, America, Indonesia and Japan. The research team developed an interview guide specifically for this study, which comprised of open-ended questions aiming to explore participants' experiences of participating in international educational programs and how these affected their current nursing/midwifery practice. To ensure that participants whose first language might not be English could understand the questions easily, the interview guide was written in plain and simple English. After providing written informed consent, a total of 22 participants were interviewed virtually via Zoom Video Communications Inc (Zoom) technology for an average of 54 minutes each. Participants included 13 general nurses, two mental health nurses, three midwives and four dual qualified nurse/midwives. Interviews took place between September 2020 and July 2022 during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the primary researcher conducted them from their home office as at that time, work and study from home was mandatory in Victoria, Australia. With participants' permission, interviews were recorded, later transcribed verbatim and to support trustworthiness and credibility of the data, were sent back to participants for member checking. All transcripts were verified by participants as

accurate accounts of their interviews. To ensure data security, Zoom interview recordings and interview transcripts were securely stored on the university's OneDrive accessible solely through the researcher's login. Additionally, hard copies of memos and journal were stored in a locked filing cabinet at the researcher's office at La Trobe University.

ANALYSIS

Data were manually analysed following Charmaz's grounded theory approach of open, focused and theoretical coding,²⁶ occurring alongside data collection until categories were saturated. Each transcript was read multiple times to generate initial open codes and then further explored to develop focused codes. These were compared with new emerging data to develop initial categories and refined as interviews continued and new data arose. From this process of coding, sub-categories emerged which were then raised to a higher level of theoretical categories.^{26,27} In keeping with grounded theory methodology, memoing occurred throughout data collection and together with keeping a reflective diary, assisted the researcher in making sense of the data. Keeping memos and a reflective journal is a key component of grounded theory methodology and is helpful for the researcher to process their thoughts and understandings during both data collection and analysis, especially as this occurs simultaneously in grounded theory.^{26,27} This process of analysis resulted in three categories being constructed, which describe outcomes across professional, cultural, and personal domains; *Informing and developing professional practice*, *Recognising and adapting to cultural differences* and *Developing as a person*. To ensure depth of reporting, the three categories are discussed separately. With all participants' voices represented, this paper focuses on the category, *Developing as a person*.

FINDINGS

Twenty-two individuals from eight countries of origin and 17 different destination countries participated. The duration between the participants' international educational programs and interviews varied from two to 26 years, with an average of nine years. The programs in which they participated also varied, with eight being practical programs, eight were clinical placement programs, five were observational programs, and another five were theoretical programs. The category, *Developing as a person*, describes the process of learning and participants' development related to their personal learning and growth as a result of participation in programs. This category is further conceptualised through two sub-categories: *Connecting and forming relations* and *Developing and growing personally*.

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CONNECTING AND FORMING RELATIONS

The sub-category, *Connecting and forming relations*, refers to verbal and non-verbal communication skills attained as well as social aspects of the programs, as participants developed friendships with peers and improved their social skills overall in the long-term. Communicating with others was an integral part of each program. Being able to communicate with peers, academic leaders, patients, nurses and midwives from host communities and others from multidisciplinary healthcare teams was described as important and led to improved confidence and strengthening of relationships in the long-term. During her Bachelor of Nursing program, a Canadian nurse participated in a student exchange program to Sweden. She reflected on how the experience had a lasting influence on her ability to communicate effectively with colleagues from diverse linguistic backgrounds. Despite encountering a language barrier during her international exchange, the participant described feeling more confident in conversing with non-English speaking colleagues.

I began to feel more comfortable communicating with multidisciplinary team, especially being in a multicultural environment with a language barrier. (Participant 5)

Similarly, an Australian nurse who participated in a student exchange program to Sweden during the second year of the Bachelor of Nursing program noted an increase in communication skills that ultimately facilitated her transition to professional practice. Through the exchange program she gained confidence in communicating with others, which had a positive impact in the long-term.

I felt more confident in my graduate year to approach other health care professionals to discuss a patient or chat informally. (Participant 2)

An Australian nurse whose participation in a short-term program to Northern Thailand during her undergraduate degree described it having a long-lasting impact on her nursing practice. Specifically, the experience helped her develop important communication skills that had been valuable in her nursing practice, especially when communicating with patients from diverse linguistic backgrounds. The participant highlighted the importance of thinking about how to phrase questions before speaking, as well as the use of rephrasing and clarification to ensure that patients could understand her. This demonstrates that the skills learned during the program continued to be useful, even after more than 20 years had passed.

You had to really think about how we're going to say things and the questions that we asked, you really had to rephrase or try these things appropriately...seeking clarification that they're understanding what's going on. I'm probably more mindful about my communication and making sure that they understand what's going on...It really does challenge you in so many ways when you're over there with communication and your delivery and your touch. (Participant 8)

In the case of an English mental health nurse who undertook a two-week observational placement in Belgium, the program had a lasting impact on her communication skills with patients who did not speak the same language. This experience informed her practice and helped her to better understand the importance of effective communication in mental health nursing. She reported that she became more attentive to patients' non-verbal cues, which improved her ability to establish rapport with patients and provide quality care.

Quite regularly we have patients who cannot speak English and, you know, it's sort of knowing that you can still, in a way, get through to them on a certain level...having that experience has helped. Paying attention to patients' non-verbal cues is important, especially when caring for those with mental health illnesses. (Participant 14)

Despite participants' difficulties when trying to communicate when others did not speak the same language, non-verbal communication skills were strengthened. A nurse who travelled from Canada to Sweden on semester exchange during final year of an undergraduate nursing degree found that in the long term, non-verbal communication was improved and important for showing compassion to patients under her care.

...being a foreigner was the most eye-opening and it made me realise how to communicate to other people effectively. If you don't speak the same language, then nonverbal communication I think got a lot stronger...a lot of nonverbal cues, like holding their hand, things like that that are universal...can really go a long way with someone who does not speak your language. (Participant 5)

During the second year of the Bachelor of Nursing program, another Australian nurse participated in a student exchange program to Sweden where she gained her first exposure to non-verbal communication with patients under her care. The nurse reflected on the significance of such skills in her professional nursing practice with the importance of being able to communicate effectively with patients through various means.

It was the first time as a student nurse that I was able to just interact with people in a non-verbal way. So just using physical touch, holding someone's hand, like putting your hand on their back, you sort of had to do that. And just your facial expressions and that sort of interaction because with some of them, there was no other way to interact. (Participant 2)

Other non-technical skills were developed during participants' international educational programs which contributed to personal development. An Australian midwife who participated in a two-week community engagement program to Uganda believed the program contributed to her personal and professional development in the long-term.

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As far as my own professional behaviour, the experience gave flexibility, fluidity and really just not being judgemental.
(Participant 3)

Forming connections and friendships was discussed by many participants, with some maintaining those friendships for decades after their programs concluded.

I formed connections for life with other midwifery students.
(Participant 3)

There's lots of friends that I still have from my exchange program...around the world, which is amazing. (Participant 5)

I still have friends in Canada that I met, and 30 years later, we are still good friends. (Participant 12)

Some participants reflected on socialisation aspects of participating in international programs and felt this also contributed to their personal growth. A nurse who travelled from Canada to Sweden on four-month nursing exchange program detailed living arrangements and how these informed how to maintain positive relations into the future.

Even outside the hospital, learning to live with people from all over the world and learning to travel with them and live very, very, very closely in a scuzzy little dorm [dormitory]... you realise the importance of building yourself a positive environment and then maintaining it. (Participant 7)

The social aspect of exchange was a highlight for some. An Australian nurse who participated in an exchange program to Canada highlighted differences in university life between the two countries and how, as an introverted person, this assisted widening her social circle.

I certainly would not have got that at home (social aspect of exchange), not in the slightest, because people at home just go to uni, you only mix with a few people. (Participant 12)

DEVELOPING AND GROWING PERSONALLY

Most participants spoke of personal journeys of growth and development occurring during and continuing after participation in international educational programs. Most felt their confidence had increased, were more resilient and independent. For some, the long-term impact was transformational as they felt changed as people and programs presented once in a lifetime experiences. This sub-category was contextualised as *Developing and growing personally*.

A Canadian nurse's experience of growing confidence during her semester exchange in Sweden had a long-term impact on her personally, and subsequently her nursing practice. She described feeling more prepared to start her nursing career as she had already overcome barriers and obstacles during her international experience. Additionally, the participant's ability to step out of her comfort zone and having new experiences during the program may have contributed to her willingness to later take on new challenges and opportunities.

I felt more ready to leap into my career because I felt like I'd already overcome any barriers and obstacles in that one semester as opposed to staying at home and being in a comfort zone... I felt much more confident in my abilities.
(Participant 5)

An international exchange program, as described by an Australian nurse who went to Sweden for a semester, helped her develop a greater sense of self-esteem, adaptability, and confidence as she navigated new environments and was challenged to step out of her comfort zone. The gains in confidence, self-esteem, and resilience that she experienced during her exchange program had lasting impacts on her personal and professional life.

It is the personal growth that you will go on, and which I got on exchange, because you have a great time, but there's also so many challenges, both personal challenges, and operational challenges of the exchange. It was a little bit stressful at times as well, but those personal skills that I gained, things like confidence, self-esteem and resilience...the exchange was a good grounding for subsequent clinical situations, I felt more confident, so when new situations arise it's not the first time something has been different or unusual. (Participant 2)

Before participating in a four-month nursing exchange program to Sweden, a Canadian nurse described herself as timid. However, the experience helped her gain confidence socially, which she found beneficial in the long-term.

I was a very timid nursing student, and it was a really good experience to help bring me out of my shell a little bit, which definitely helped that. That alone was probably the biggest thing I gained from the whole experience, including the clinical placement was just like coming out of your shell a little bit and feeling more comfortable. (Participant 7)

Building confidence was also significant and lifechanging for a midwife from England who participated in a program to America during her degree. Following graduation, it influenced her decision to live and work internationally.

It had probably given me a bit more confidence to go 'yeah, I could move to another country', so then I got a job and moved halfway around the world. (Participant 13)

Similarly, a nurse from the United Kingdom who participated in a four-week program to South Africa found her confidence increased because of the program.

It gave me confidence in myself, confidence in me as a person.
(Participant 19)

After participating in an exchange program to Sweden during the second year of her Bachelor of Nursing degree, a nurse from Australia reported that the experience helped her strengthen her resilience and tolerance. This development of personal qualities had positive long-term impacts, enhancing her ability to adapt to challenging situations and work collaboratively with individuals from diverse backgrounds.

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Nursing is incredibly hard and (you) have to be so resilient. You need tolerance, resilience; that was strengthened through time overseas. I do feel very resilient at work that I can, no matter what I'm feeling, maybe on the inside, I can push past that, and I can just be professional at work, whereas I see a lot of other nurses, especially younger junior nurses have trouble with that. I think that personal growth on exchange definitely contributed to that. (Participant 2)

For some participants in exchange programs, the need to live away from home for the duration of the program was an opportunity for them to become more independent and increase their confidence. Without their usual support networks, they had to rely on their own abilities, which in turn led to feelings of empowerment and self-assurance that persisted long after the programs ended. This newfound sense of independence and confidence not only benefitted participants in their personal lives but also in their professional careers, as they were better equipped to take on new challenges and navigate unfamiliar situations with courage and determination.

It has given me more courage, it is very empowering to go abroad because it's very scary and very far from home and after doing it, you feel proud of yourself. I would say it's something I would always carry with me; it made me more confident. (Participant 18)

It's a point of difference, you get to stand on your own two feet. (Participant 12)

Participating in international educational programs had a profound and transformative impact on many participants, with several describing their experiences as life changing. For some, the program was a catalyst for personal growth, leading them to feel changed as people in the long term. This transformation affected their personal beliefs, values, and worldview. By broadening their horizons and exposing them to new cultures and perspectives, the program equipped participants with deeper understandings and appreciation of diversity, ultimately fostering their personal development in ways that persisted long after the program ended.

It did change me... I don't think I'd be the nurse I am today if I didn't get to experience these things... and it changed my life. It really did. It just it was such a profound type of experience and so many things that you got to experience, and you come back, and you just say, 'wow.' (Participant 8)

I think possibly the experience could shape the rest of your life and your career... you end up becoming a different person. I felt like I definitely changed as a result of that... I'd do it again in a heartbeat... I had this life experience which is probably the most exciting thing I've ever done. That is something that will stay with me. I think it makes me more interesting, because I feel like I've experienced something more than just an ordinary day to day life. It makes me happy thinking about it... that was the first experience of being away from home. (Participant 19)

Most participants demonstrated personal growth through their participation in programs, with some expressing the long-term outcome of gaining independence by moving out of their homes and living independently.

When I started studying, I was living at home, living with mom and dad and then I went to being fully fledged independent abroad, taking care of myself. So, I had a lot of personal growth. (Participant 5)

Before I went on exchange, I lived at home, so this was way out there for me and absolutely made me want to continue to be more independent. I came home in the December, graduated six months later in June and by September, I had bought my own house and was out on my own. So, I had catapulted... that kind of trajectory. (Participant 7)

Gaining awareness and empathy were positive outcomes reported by an Australian nurse who participated in a short-term program to Northern Thailand during her undergraduate degree. These outcomes of increased awareness and empathy contributed to personal transformation in the long-term.

It is as if you come back and you, I don't know what it is, you're grateful for the experience and you're thankful, but you're so grateful to be home. And I know I can never forget. You never forget. I've talked to other nurses that have done their own volunteer experience and it's changed them, and you see it with them as well and they just have this. It's a different awareness and empathy. (Participant 8)

Similarly, a nurse, who travelled from Australia to Vanuatu on a short-term program during undergraduate nursing studies, found they gained perspective in an emotional sense.

I have a better perspective on not just nursing but how to care for patients – not in a skill sense, but in an emotional and well-being sense. (Participant 4)

Some participants reported that participating in international educational programs contributed to their personal growth and development, leading to becoming well-rounded individuals and building maturity that continued to positively impact their lives in the long term.

I came back as a more sort of, well rounded person. (Participant 2)

That practise at adulting outside of your normal environment was probably really helpful. Sort of helps you rack up that sort of maturity. (Participant 13)

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DISCUSSION

This study sought to explain how nurses and midwives were transformed through participation in international educational programs. The category, *Developing as a Person*, which was further conceptualised through two sub-categories, *Connecting and forming relations* and *Developing and growing personally*, described the process of transformative learning and participants' development in relation to personal life skills.

The sub-category *Connecting and forming relations* described participants' experiences of improved communication, both verbal and non-verbal, in multicultural settings. In addition, participants made connections and friendships with others that were often long-lasting. Previous studies have only reported short-term outcomes of a similar nature. Phillips et al.²⁹ interviewed nursing students before and after a two-week program to Ghana and described positive relationships and connections students developed with host communities, which were unanticipated program outcomes. Relationships and teamwork were also reported outcomes by Baldacchino who analysed students' reflective journals and conducted focus group interviews one week after students returned from programs in Lourdes.³⁰ Teamwork was described by Baldacchino specifically as team building and sense of belonging as students felt welcome by a large group of volunteers.³⁰ Additionally, Gilliland et al described short-term outcomes for nursing students, pharmacy students, and two students from other health care majors who participated in an elective to either China or India as attainment of personal life skills, including increased maturation and being able to build relationships and collaborate with others.³¹ These studies reported outcomes immediately after participating in study abroad programs, however the current study indicates there are also long-term outcomes from experiences and demonstrates outcomes were maintained and continued to develop over time.

The sub-category, *Developing and growing personally*, described participants' attainment of various life skills, including increased confidence and resilience, but also deeper processes of change or transformation for some. These findings resonate with a recent review reporting outcomes of nursing and midwifery students participating in international educational programs during pre-registration education that found a majority of included studies reported outcomes relating to students' personal growth.³ All 56 studies described outcomes for students on a personal level after participating in mobility programs, described in varying ways and often as processes of change. Personal transformation was described by Carter et al as an outcome, with some students revealing that "I'll never be the same" feeling they had been forever changed by their experiences, seeing the world through new eyes and gaining new life skills.^{22(p 186)} Baernholdt et al and Morgan similarly found outcomes for students included change and

transformation,^{32,33} with participants in Baernholdt's study describing life-altering experiences being able to receive part of their education in other countries.³² Most studies in Johnston et al.'s review, explored short-term outcomes with data collected within six months post-program,³ and only one study surveying participants up to ten years post-experience,³⁴ demonstrating a scarcity of studies exploring long-term outcomes. Anand et al evaluated study abroad programs across several disciplines, finding that several factors impacted transformative learning for students including extent of cultural differences, length of travel, level of engagement in visited countries, and opportunities for unstructured learning.¹⁸ Specific to health and medical students, Anand et al found challenging students' worldviews and providing opportunities for informal discussion positively impacted transformative learning, in addition to the development of empathy in healthcare professionals as a result of using transformation learning theory.¹⁸

As part of a larger grounded theory study, this paper reported on one of three categories that emerged from the data. Other categories included *Informing and developing professional practice*, describing the process of learning and participants' development in relation to their professional nursing and/or midwifery practice. Category two, *Recognising and adapting to cultural differences*, described the process and participants' applications of their cultural learning in professional nursing and/or midwifery practice. Together the three categories relate to each other and will be further conceptualised to develop a theory grounded in the data that can explain the process nurses and midwives undergo, resulting from participation in international educational programs during their pre-registration education.

The experience of studying and working in a foreign country can be a transformative and eye-opening experience that challenges individuals to step out of their comfort zones, adapt to new environments and cultures, and develop new skills and perspectives. The present study highlights the lasting impact of international educational programs, resulting in significant personal growth and development for nurses and midwives. The findings reveal how the benefits of these programs endure over time, continuing to shape and enhance one's personal life skills many years after completion. Some participants in this study reported ongoing benefits for themselves and their professional practice, even two decades or more post-program. This highlights the critical role that international education programs can play in undergraduate nursing and midwifery education, not only in the short term but also in the long term, by promoting ongoing personal self-improvement and growth. The findings may be useful for educators and healthcare employers in designing and implementing effective international educational programs, as well as for individuals considering participating in these programs. Ultimately, understanding the long-term outcomes of

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international educational programs can contribute to the overall improvement of nursing and midwifery practice on a global scale and potentially, across other disciplines.³⁵ This study sheds light on ways in which international educational programs can contribute to personal development of nurses and midwives, ultimately helping to prepare them for the challenges of a global and multicultural healthcare environment. It is likely that these findings could be applied across other healthcare professions and beyond, particularly in fields such as education and emergency services, where non-technical skills such as communication, empathy, resilience and self-awareness are essential.

LIMITATIONS

Grounded theory methodology was employed and therefore findings cannot be generalised. However, given participants came from eight countries and undertook programs in 17 destinations, providing diverse perspectives, it is likely that experiences resonate with other nurses and midwives, and potentially, beyond these professions. Due to language barriers, only nurses and midwives who could speak and understand English were interviewed, so views from non-English speaking nurses and midwives may be different. Additionally, it is possible that participants may have selectively reported on positive aspects of their experience, potentially bias the findings.

CONCLUSION

As part of a larger study exploring impacts of an international educational program during a nurse's or midwife's pre-registration program on subsequent practice, this paper has described how nurses and midwives were transformed on a personal level through participation. Key findings revealed long-lasting benefits on a personal level, which in turn, contributed positively to professional practice. International educational programs were found to assist in improving communication skills, forming and maintaining connections, promoted growth and development and provided transformative learning.

Implications of this study support the ongoing need for institutions to provide nursing and midwifery students with opportunities to participate in such programs during pre-registration education. It is important to ensure that transformative learning is possible through well designed programs that include critical reflection. Personal growth and development gained are beneficial to nurses and midwives who undertake the programs, but also to patients they subsequently care for by promoting culturally safe, quality care. It is recommended that healthcare employers acknowledge the significant and long-lasting positive impact of these international educational programs on the personal and professional growth of nurse and midwife employees. Such recognition is essential for effective workforce planning

as these individuals are likely to possess valuable non-technical skills and be reflective practitioners, making them highly sought after in the industry.

Future research is warranted to gain insights from non-English speaking nurses and midwives, as well as those from diverse global regions, who engage in international educational programs during their pre-registration studies. In addition, it is recommended to conduct follow-up studies with employers to assess the implementation of learnings from these programs among staff and explore strategies for optimising their application in clinical practice settings.

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