

# Theory-Practice Gap: Perceptions of Nurse Faculty, Clinicians and Students in Ghana

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## Introduction

The overall goal of this research work was to explore the understanding of theory-practice gap from the perspective of nurse faculty and nursing students in Ghana. Defined by Maben, Latter, and Clark (2006) as the disparities that exist between the best practice ideals and values taught, and those encountered in practice, the concept of theory-practice gap is not new. However, despite several attempts of nurse faculty and clinicians to address the theory-practice gap, it remains a central issue in both nursing education and practice. Most of the initiatives to bridge the theory-practice gap have evolved in geographic areas such as the US, UK, and other developed nations. Little research addressing the issues is evident in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). Given the unique context of nursing and healthcare in Ghana and other nations of SSA, identification of the nature and scope of the theory-practice gap needs to be undertaken. Without this requisite knowledge effective strategies to address the theory-practice gap may not be developed.

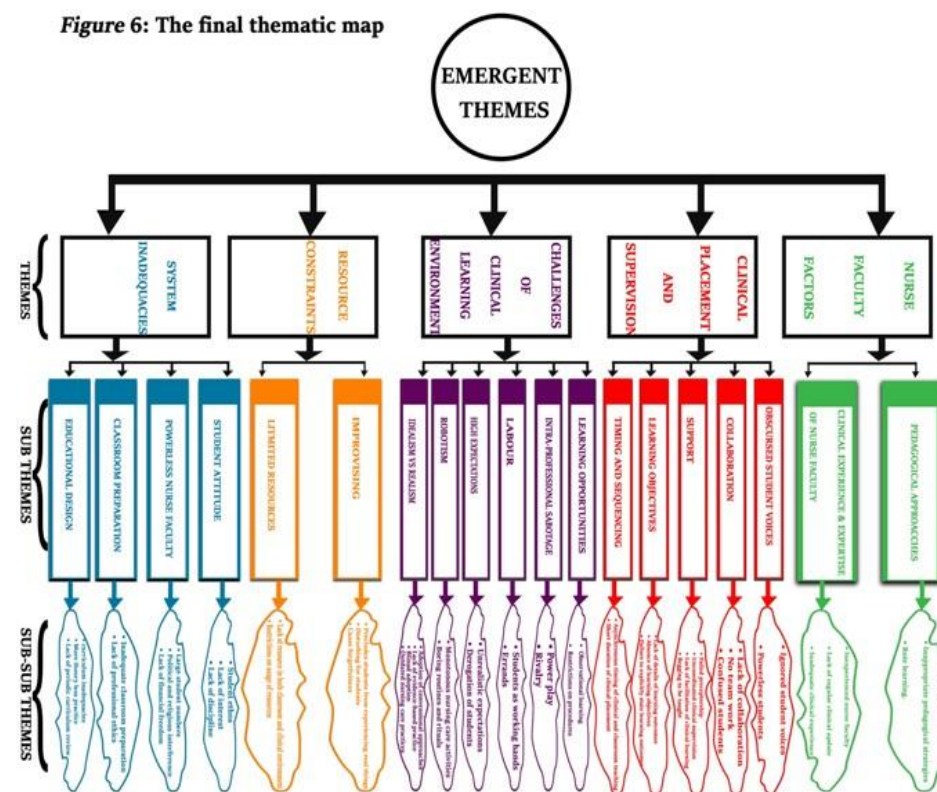
## Main Text

A descriptive phenomenological methodology was used. A purposive sampling technique was used in recruiting 32 study participants. Data were collected using focus group discussions.

Findings of this study confirmed the existence of the theory-practice gap in the Ghanaian context of nursing education and practice, and add to the growing literature acclaiming theory-practice gap as a global phenomenon. The existence of the theory-practice gap in this setting, revolves around inadequacies of fundamental issues regarding nursing education, the general lack of resources in both the university and hospital settings, failure of nurse faculty to fully engage in contemporary clinical practice and the patterns and challenges of student involvement in clinical learning experiences.

The theory practice gap is recognized as a major threat to the proficiency of nursing as a profession to cope with the ever evolving and increasingly complex healthcare needs of the individual and society. The recognition of the complexity of healthcare delivery systems and the need for parallel improvements in nursing roles prompted the introduction of major reforms in nursing education in some parts of the world (Marrow, 2009; Rich & Nugent, 2010; Salminen, et al., 2010; Spitzer & Perronoud, 2006). In Ghana, stakeholders in nursing education and practice are yet to wake up to the realities of the implications of the theory-practice gap and its associated challenges on contemporary nursing education and nursing practice. Key themes revealing the scope and contributory factors to the theory-practice gap in the context of Ghana are illustrated in the picture below.

Figure 6: The final thematic map



## Conclusion

The theory-practice gap in nursing has existed for over four decades and it is projected to continue in some manner. Based on the findings of this study on the nature and scope of theory-practice gap in nursing in Ghana, the redesign of nursing education and the development of contextually relevant research based-strategies to bridge the gap to ensure the training of competent nurses are fundamental.

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