

Beyond Language: A Multi-Level Framework for Integrating CALD Nurses in Global Healthcare Systems

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ABSTRACT

The integration of Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) nurses into global healthcare systems presents both strategic opportunities and complex challenges. This study systematically reviews empirical evidence on professional language acquisition and integration strategies for CALD nurses, drawing on qualitative and mixed-methods research published between 2010 and 2025. Utilizing theoretical frameworks such as Adult Learning Theory, Social Integration Theory, and Systems Theory, the analysis explores how multi-level support systems including workplace-based language programs, peer mentoring, and institutional policies shape professional outcomes. Findings reveal that successful integration is not solely dependent on individual language proficiency but is deeply influenced by organizational commitment, inclusive leadership, and culturally responsive practices. Structured interventions like clinical communication workshops and the Språkombud (“Language Advocate”) model demonstrate significant impact on enhancing communication competence, emotional well-being, and job satisfaction among CALD nurses. Furthermore, peer collaboration and institutional equity policies contribute to fostering inclusive work cultures and improving patient care outcomes. The synthesis underscores the necessity of a coordinated, multi-level framework to ensure sustainable integration, reduce workforce disparities, and enhance the quality of care in multicultural clinical settings. By aligning pedagogical, interpersonal, and policy-driven strategies, healthcare organizations can create equitable pathways for CALD nurse retention and professional growth, ultimately strengthening workforce diversity and cultural competence in healthcare delivery.

KEYWORDS

CALD nurses, language acquisition, integration strategies, cultural competence, healthcare systems

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INTRODUCTION

In the past decade, much research has focused on the integration of culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) professionals within healthcare systems, particularly in addressing the challenges they face in language acquisition, cultural adaptation, and professional development (Kaushik et al., 2016; Suleiman et al., 2022). As healthcare environments become increasingly multicultural, the inclusion of CALD nurses has been recognized not only as a matter of equity but also as a strategic necessity to enhance patient care quality and workforce diversity (Al-Btoush & El-Bcheraoui, 2024; Rosen & Miaari, 2025). Numerous studies have explored various interventions such as workplace-based language training, peer mentoring programs, and institutional policies aimed at supporting CALD nurses' successful transition into clinical settings. These efforts reflect a growing awareness of the complex interplay between linguistic competence, social integration, and organizational support in shaping professional outcomes for CALD nurses (Joensuu et al., 2024; Suleiman et al., 2023).

Despite these advancements, it remains unclear why some CALD nurses thrive under structured support mechanisms while others continue to face persistent barriers related to communication, exclusion, and institutional biases. While existing literature emphasizes the importance of language proficiency and cultural competence, there is limited synthesis of how multi-level support systems ranging from interpersonal relationships to organizational policies collectively influence professional language acquisition and integration (Kamau et al., 2022; Pho et al., 2020; Teixeira et al., 2023). Moreover, few studies have comprehensively examined the long-term implications of these support structures on both nurse retention and patient safety outcomes. This gap highlights the need for a more holistic understanding of the contextual factors that enable or hinder CALD nurses' full participation in healthcare delivery (Henderson et al., 2018; Rajpoot et al., 2024; Stewart et al., 1999).

The purpose of this study was to systematically review and synthesize empirical evidence on how professional language acquisition and integration are supported among CALD nurses within healthcare environments (Ghazal et al., 2020; Tomietto et al., 2015). Drawing upon qualitative and mixed-methods studies published between 2010 and 2025, this research explores the effectiveness of structured interventions such as workplace-based language programs, peer mentoring systems, and institutional diversity policies. Furthermore, the study outlines the implications of these findings for healthcare organizations aiming to foster inclusive work cultures, improve communication competence, and enhance patient care outcomes (Handtke et al., 2019; Kamau et al., 2022). By integrating theoretical frameworks such as Adult Learning Theory, Social Integration Theory, and Systems Theory, this review offers a comprehensive lens through which to understand the multifaceted nature of CALD nurse integration (Chukwu et al., 2023).

This paper contributes to the on going discourse on workforce diversity and professional development by presenting a detailed analysis of key strategies and their impact across multiple dimensions. The findings reveal that successful language acquisition among CALD nurses is not merely an individual endeavor but a systemic process shaped by institutional commitment, peer collaboration, and culturally responsive practices (McGrath et al., 2014; Pho et al., 2020; Rajpoot et al., 2024). Through thematic synthesis and critical evaluation of existing research, this study provides actionable insights for

policymakers, educators, and healthcare leaders seeking to create sustainable pathways for CALD nurse integration (Henderson et al., 2018; Lee et al., 2020). Ultimately, the research underscores the importance of adopting a coordinated, multi-level approach to ensure equitable opportunities, professional growth, and high-quality patient care in increasingly diverse healthcare settings.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative systematic review approach guided by the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) framework. The goal is to synthesize existing empirical evidence on how professional language acquisition and integration are supported among Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) nurses within healthcare environments. This methodological design ensures rigor through structured literature searching, selection, data extraction, and synthesis processes. While the primary focus remains qualitative, findings can be complemented with quantitative outcome measures where available, supporting a mixed-methods interpretation. By aligning with PRISMA guidelines, this review systematically identifies patterns and themes across studies, enhancing the credibility and transferability of insights related to CALD nurse integration.

Setting and Context

The research setting encompasses healthcare organizations that employ CALD nurses, particularly those operating in multilingual and multicultural clinical contexts such as hospitals, long-term care facilities, and community health centers. These environments are characterized by high linguistic diversity among both staff and patients, highlighting the need for effective communication strategies and inclusive practices. The context emphasizes the real-world challenges faced by CALD nurses, including language barriers, cultural adaptation, and institutional support systems, which collectively shape their professional development and patient care outcomes.

Participants

The primary participants include nurses from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) backgrounds and nurses with Non-English Speaking Backgrounds (NESB), who are directly engaged in the process of language acquisition and professional integration. Secondary participants consist of individuals who contribute indirectly to this process, such as supervisors, mentors, and colleagues working closely with CALD nurses. Additional perspectives will also be drawn from trainers, educators, and healthcare administrators involved in implementing institutional policies and programs aimed at facilitating CALD nurses' successful transition and growth within the healthcare system.

Sampling Strategy

A systematic sampling approach aligned with PRISMA guidelines will be used to identify all relevant peer-reviewed articles published between 2010 and 2025 that explore language acquisition, integration strategies, and support systems for CALD nurses in healthcare settings. Inclusion criteria will prioritize studies that explicitly examine the role of work community support, use qualitative or mixed-method designs, and report measurable or descriptive outcomes

related to communication competence, job satisfaction, cultural adaptation, or patient safety. Exclusion criteria include studies not focused on nursing, non-peer-reviewed sources, and those lacking detail on language learning or integration support.

Data Collection

Data collection follows a structured PRISMA-compliant search protocol across major academic databases including PubMed, CINAHL, PsycINFO, Scopus, and ERIC. Keywords such as “CALD nurses,” “language acquisition,” “peer mentoring,” “workplace-based language programs,” and “Språkombud model” will be used to identify relevant articles. After removing duplicates, titles and abstracts will be screened for relevance, followed by full-text review. Data will then be extracted using a standardized form capturing study characteristics, methodology, context, interventions, and outcomes. In addition to literature retrieval, if included in future phases, primary data may be gathered via semi-structured interviews, observational notes from training sessions, and document analysis of institutional reports and policy documents.

Intervention Framework

Several structured interventions derived from the literature will be synthesized to support professional language acquisition and integration of CALD nurses. Workplace-based language initiatives include clinical communication workshops focused on medical terminology, patient interaction scripts, and intercultural communication skills. The Språkombud (“Language Advocate”) model, adapted from Sweden, involves assigning bilingual staff to provide just-in-time language coaching during daily practice. Peer support systems will be examined through mentorship and buddy programs designed to foster feedback and modeling of professional communication. Cultural orientation and emotional well-being supports will be explored through training programs for host staff and access to counseling services. At the organizational level, equitable promotion pathways and inclusive leadership practices will be discussed as key enablers of sustainable integration.

Data Analysis

Qualitative thematic synthesis will be applied following the methods outlined by Thomas and Harden, involving line-by-line coding of findings, followed by descriptive and analytical thematic development. NVivo or Atlas.ti software will support data management and coding consistency. Themes will be organized according to core constructs identified in the literature, such as language support, peer engagement, cultural competence, and institutional policies. Where applicable, quantitative data from included studies will be analyzed descriptively or statistically (e.g., SPSS or R), assessing trends in outcomes like language test scores or retention rates. Findings will be interpreted through an integrated lens informed by theoretical frameworks such as Adult Learning Theory, Social Integration Theory, and Systems Theory.

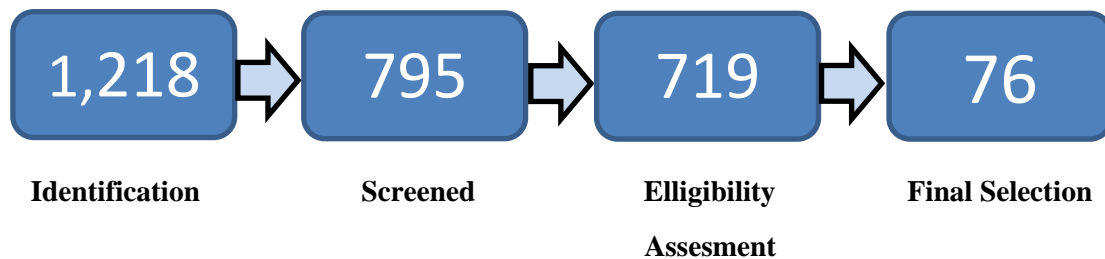


Figure 1. PRISMA Step

Ethical Considerations

This study primarily relies on published literature, direct ethical approval for participant involvement is not required. However, when drawing from original studies involving human subjects, only research that has undergone prior ethical review and obtained informed consent will be included. For any future primary data collection phases, ethical clearance will be sought from relevant institutional review boards. All personal identifiers will be removed from data sources, and confidentiality and voluntary participation will be ensured throughout the research process. Special attention will be given to protecting vulnerable populations, including migrant workers and early-career nurses.

RESULTS

The successful professional language acquisition among nurses from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds is significantly influenced by the presence and quality of work community support. As healthcare systems become increasingly globalized, integrating CALD nurses into clinical environments requires more than just linguistic competence it demands a holistic, supportive framework that addresses cultural adaptation, psychological well-being, and professional integration. This analysis synthesizes current research to explore how structured work community support can facilitate language learning and professional development among these nurses.

Table 1: Comprehensive Overview of Work Community Support and Professional Language Acquisition for Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) Nurses

THEME / DIMENSION	CONTEXT & CORE CONCEPT	KEY STRATEGIES & MECHANISMS	OUTCOMES & IMPACTS	THEORETICAL UNDERPINNING
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Structured Language Learning Through Workplace Initiatives	Workplace-based language programs help CALD nurses develop communication and cultural skills within real clinical contexts.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Structured workshops in clinical settings - Språkombud ("Language Advocate") model - Integration into orientation and ongoing training 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Improved communication - Increased confidence and job satisfaction - Better emotional well-being 	Adult learning theory Workplace learning frameworks
Addressing Challenges Faced by Non-English Speaking Background (NESB) Nurses	NESB nurses often face exclusion, miscommunication, and cultural adjustment issues that affect performance and inclusion.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Intensive clinical language support - Psychological and emotional assistance - Cultural orientation sessions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Enhanced oral communication - Greater sense of belonging - Reduced stress and burnout 	Social integration theory Psychological safety
Strategies for Successful Integration of CALD Nurses	CALD nurses require multi-level support to ensure professional and social integration into healthcare systems.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Staff cultural competency training - Peer mentoring and buddy systems - Equitable policies and anti-discrimination reporting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Inclusive workplace culture - Stronger team cohesion - Clear role expectations 	Organizational justice theory Social identity theory
Impact of Language Barriers on Patient Care	Language barriers compromise patient safety and quality of care, highlighting the need for direct language proficiency among CALD nurses.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Direct language skill development - Bilingualism encouragement - Focus on medical terminology 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Safer and more accurate care - Improved patient trust - Reduced reliance on interpreters 	Communication accommodation theory Patient safety frameworks
Importance of Peer Support and Collaborative Relationships	Peer collaboration supports the professional growth and adaptation of CALD nurses, especially during early employment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Peer networks and mentorship - Real-time feedback and modeling - Inclusive teamwork practices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Stronger interpersonal bonds - Improved adaptability and motivation - Better interdisciplinary engagement 	Social support theory Communities of practice
Synthesis of Key Findings	Language acquisition for CALD nurses is a complex process requiring institutional, social, and personal support.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Integrated approach combining language, culture, policy, and peer support - Institutional commitment to diversity and inclusion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Long-term success of CALD nurses - Culturally responsive healthcare systems - Improved organizational and patient outcomes 	Systems theory Cultural competence models

The table 1 provides a comprehensive synthesis of the key dimensions, strategies, and outcomes associated with work community support in facilitating professional language acquisition and integration of culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) nurses. It highlights how structured

workplace-based language initiatives such as the Swedish Språkombud model not only enhance clinical communication skills but also foster confidence, job satisfaction, and emotional well-being by embedding learning within authentic healthcare contexts. In tandem, addressing the challenges faced by non-English speaking background (NESB) nurses through intensive language instruction, psychological support, and cultural orientation is critical for mitigating barriers such as exclusion and miscommunication. Successful integration further hinges on multi-level organizational efforts including cultural competency training for staff, peer mentoring systems, and equitable policies that safeguard against discrimination ultimately shaping an inclusive and supportive workplace culture. The impact of language proficiency extends beyond individual performance to directly influence patient safety and care quality, reinforcing the need to equip CALD nurses with direct language competencies rather than relying solely on interpreters. Equally important are peer relationships and collaborative dynamics, which promote psychological safety, knowledge exchange, and interdisciplinary teamwork. Taken together, these findings illustrate that professional language acquisition among CALD nurses is not a linear or isolated process, but rather a complex interplay between institutional structures, interpersonal support, cultural understanding, and personal motivation. A holistic, integrated approach that combines structured language development, inclusive policies, cultural adaptation, and peer engagement is essential for enabling CALD nurses to thrive professionally while enhancing the diversity, resilience, and effectiveness of healthcare organizations.

DISCUSSION

The findings clearly demonstrate that structured workplace-based language initiatives play a pivotal role in facilitating the professional language acquisition and integration of Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) nurses. These programs such as clinical communication workshops and the implementation of models like the Språkombud ("Language Advocate") are designed to offer contextualized learning experiences embedded directly within real-world clinical settings. Unlike generic language courses, which often lack relevance to specific professional contexts, these interventions are tailored to address the precise communication demands encountered by nurses in healthcare environments. For instance, they focus on essential skills such as patient interaction scripts, medical terminology, intercultural communication, and documentation practices. This targeted approach not only enhances linguistic competence but also significantly improves CALD nurses' confidence, job satisfaction, and emotional well-being. Grounded in Adult Learning Theory and Workplace Learning Frameworks, these strategies emphasize the importance of experiential and practice-oriented education. By aligning language instruction with actual workplace tasks, these programs ensure that learning is both meaningful and immediately applicable, thereby supporting sustainable professional development. The success of these initiatives underscores the necessity of integrating language support into daily clinical routines rather than treating it as an isolated or supplementary activity.

A critical insight derived from the synthesis of qualitative evidence is the recognition of the unique and often systemic challenges faced by nurses with Non-English Speaking Backgrounds (NESB). These

include experiences of exclusion, frequent miscommunication, and difficulties adapting to new cultural norms in the workplace(Lai et al., 2023). Such barriers can lead to heightened stress levels, reduced job performance, and a diminished sense of belonging, all of which negatively impact both individual well-being and organizational cohesion. To effectively counteract these issues, the analysis highlights the importance of implementing comprehensive support systems that go beyond language training alone(Gellerstedt et al., 2019). Intensive clinical language support, combined with psychological assistance and structured cultural orientation sessions, emerges as a key strategy for addressing the multifaceted needs of NESB nurses(Alharbi et al., 2023; Roth et al., 2023). These interventions are informed by Social Integration Theory and Psychological Safety frameworks, which emphasize the need for inclusive environments where individuals feel safe, respected, and supported(Ito et al., 2021; Morton et al., 2021). Without such targeted efforts, language barriers may persist, leading to long-term consequences such as high turnover rates, low morale, and compromised team dynamics. Therefore, proactive and holistic support mechanisms are essential to ensuring that NESB nurses are not only linguistically equipped but also emotionally and socially integrated into their work environments.

The successful integration of CALD nurses cannot be achieved without coordinated efforts across multiple levels of healthcare organizations. Institutional policies that promote equity, enforce anti-discrimination measures, and encourage diversity-conscious leadership are fundamental in cultivating an inclusive organizational culture(Müller et al., 2024; Ropponen et al., 2022). These structural supports create the foundation upon which interpersonal and team-level integration can occur. Complementing these top-down initiatives, peer mentoring and buddy systems provide essential interpersonal scaffolding that enhances social integration, fosters team cohesion, and facilitates knowledge transfer. These strategies are particularly effective when aligned with principles from Organizational Justice Theory and Social Identity Theory, which highlight the significance of fair treatment, shared identity, and mutual respect in shaping workplace experiences(Lee & Dahinten, 2021). When institutional policies reflect a genuine commitment to diversity and inclusion, and are reinforced through supportive interpersonal relationships at the team level, CALD nurses are more likely to feel valued, accepted, and empowered to contribute meaningfully to patient care and team dynamics(Covell & Sands, 2020; Lunden et al., 2017; Villamin et al., 2023). This multi-tiered approach ensures that integration is not left to chance or individual effort alone but is systematically nurtured through both policy and practice, creating a truly inclusive environment where all nurses regardless of background can thrive.

One of the most compelling findings from this review is the strong link between CALD nurses' language proficiency and the overall quality and safety of patient care. Language barriers were found to compromise accurate communication between nurses, patients, and other healthcare professionals, increasing the risk of misunderstandings, errors, and reliance on interpreters(Hua et al., 2024; Jaeger et al., 2019). These issues can ultimately jeopardize patient outcomes and diminish trust in the healthcare system. To mitigate these risks, embedding language development directly into clinical workflows has been identified as a promising solution(Jaeger et al., 2019). Encouraging bilingualism among staff, providing just-in-time language coaching, and incorporating language skill development into routine training not only enhance communicative competence but also reduce dependency on external translation services(Tehrani et al., 2021). These insights align closely with Communication

Accommodation Theory and established Patient Safety Frameworks, which emphasize the importance of clear, culturally sensitive communication in healthcare delivery (Alshammari & Alenezi, 2023). By proactively equipping CALD nurses with the linguistic tools needed to perform effectively in complex clinical environments, healthcare organizations can improve patient safety, enhance care coordination, and build stronger therapeutic relationships (Wong, 2025). This approach reinforces the idea that language support is not merely a professional development concern but a critical component of high-quality, patient-centered care.

Finally, the synthesis emphasizes the crucial role of peer relationships and collaborative work environments in supporting the professional adaptation and growth of CALD nurses. Peer mentorship programs, structured feedback loops, and inclusive teamwork practices serve as vital mechanisms for fostering psychological safety, building trust, and promoting a sense of belonging particularly during the early stages of employment (Lee & Dahinten, 2021). These relational dynamics are supported by Social Support Theory and Communities of Practice, which highlight the value of shared experiences, informal learning, and mutual encouragement in professional development. When CALD nurses are actively included in peer networks, they gain access to modeling opportunities, constructive feedback, and collaborative problem-solving all of which accelerate their integration and long-term retention. Furthermore, inclusive teamwork practices not only benefit CALD nurses but also enrich the broader organizational culture by promoting cross-cultural understanding and interdisciplinary collaboration (Alshammari & Alenezi, 2023; Smith et al., 2022). Thus, cultivating a workplace environment characterized by open communication, mutual respect, and collective responsibility is not just advantageous it is essential for building diverse, resilient, and high-performing healthcare teams capable of delivering equitable and effective care to increasingly multicultural patient populations (Jaeger et al., 2019; Müller et al., 2024; Tehrani et al., 2023).

CONCLUSIONS

This study systematically examines the mechanisms and support systems that facilitate professional language acquisition and integration of Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) nurses within healthcare environments. The findings reveal that successful integration is a multidimensional process shaped by structured workplace-based language initiatives such as clinical communication workshops and the Språkombud ("Language Advocate") model, which embed language learning directly into real-world clinical contexts. Peer mentoring and buddy systems further enhance integration by fostering interpersonal relationships, providing modeling opportunities, and promoting psychological safety. At the institutional level, inclusive leadership, equitable promotion pathways, and cultural competence training for host staff are essential in creating supportive and non-discriminatory work environments. These strategies collectively improve linguistic proficiency, job satisfaction, emotional well-being, and team cohesion while also enhancing patient safety and organizational effectiveness. Guided by theoretical frameworks such as Adult Learning Theory, Social Integration Theory, and Systems Theory, this review emphasizes the importance of a holistic, multi-level approach that integrates pedagogical,

interpersonal, and policy-driven support mechanisms. By aligning these insights with institutional practices, healthcare organizations can create sustainable pathways for CALD nurse integration, ultimately strengthening workforce diversity and the delivery of culturally responsive care.

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