

Promoting language competence among international nursing staff in Germany in everyday practice

Henny Silalahi^{1*}

¹ Europa Universität Flensburg (EUF), Flensburg, Germany

*Correspondence: Henny Silalahi. Address: Europa Universität Flensburg (EUF), Flensburg, Germany. Email: h_susanti@hotmail.com

The growing number of international nursing staff in Germany presents both opportunities and challenges. According to a report by the Federal Employment Agency, the increase in nursing personnel in Germany since 2022 is primarily due to the recruitment of international nursing staff (Bundesagentur für Arbeit, 2024). Without them, the German healthcare system would not be sustainable. Studies show that international nursing staff bring considerable potential in terms of medical knowledge, treatment care, and interdisciplinary collaboration, which can be traced back to medically oriented job profiles in their home countries (Slotala, 2024). Nevertheless, language barriers prove to be the greatest obstacle in everyday practice, hindering both professional and personal development in Germany. Clinical instructors report that language barriers—particularly in documentation and communication with patients or clients frequently lead to misunderstandings. Against this background, practice-oriented language promotion should be implemented in the workplace.

To obtain recognition as a registered nurse in Germany (*Pflegefachfrau/ Pflegefachmann*), international nursing staff are required to demonstrate 2,500 hours of practical training and 2,100 hours of theoretical training (Saul & Jürgensen, 2021). Inequivalence often arises in the practical component, particularly in the settings of psychiatry, pediatrics, and home care. Until the recognition examination, international nursing staff spend most of their time in the workplace. A practice-oriented language promotion approach can sustainably support the recognition process and the integration of international nursing staff in the new country. This allows various work situations to be purposefully simulated in the daily routine, such as handovers, patient history taking, or telephone conversations with other departments. In this context, it is particularly important to critically reflect on certain communication patterns. For example, a clinical instructor reported that an affirmative "Yes, yes" should not automatically be taken

as a sign of understanding. This became evident when she sent an international nursing staff member to a patient, who subsequently walked in the wrong direction (Wochnik et al. 2025). This example illustrates how important it is to actively ensure comprehension and to deliberately encourage follow-up questions. In medication management, such a situation can lead to a serious nursing error.

Within the framework of practice-oriented language promotion, work assignments serve as binding agreements between clinical instructors and international nursing staff. They make learning progress and the need for individual support visible in the long term. This enables international nursing staff to take responsibility for themselves and their learning process. Integration into the nursing team is equally essential for learning success in the workplace. Foreign nursing staff who feel well integrated into the team demonstrably also exhibit better language skills (Wochnik et al. 2025). Experts agree that language promotion should not begin only upon arrival in Germany. Many institutions now require a B2 language certificate as a prerequisite for entry. Learning a new language to B2 level while simultaneously adapting to a new country and unfamiliar care system represents a significant burden. This multiple overloads often leads to excessive demands with consequences for the physical and mental health of those affected. Unstable health conditions can impair the continuity of care and retention within institutions (Fendi, 2022). The impact of language competence among international nursing staff is therefore not limited to the personal and intradisciplinary team level — language is simultaneously an expression of, and a prerequisite for, maintaining patient safety. Practice-oriented language promotion is thus a central building block for retaining international nursing staff long-term in the German healthcare system and guaranteeing patient safety.



References

- Bundesagentur für Arbeit (2024). Arbeitsmarktsituation im Pflegebereich. Nürnberg. https://statistik.arbeitsagentur.de/DE/Statischer-Content/Statistiken/Themen-im-Fokus/Berufe/Generische-Publikationen/Altenpflege.pdf?__blob=publicationFile
- Fendi, S. (2022). Zwischen Licht und Schatten-eine explorative Studie zum Ausbildungserleben von Auszubildenden in der Pflege unter besonderer Betrachtung von Migrationshintergründen. Philosophisch-Theologische Hochschule Vallendar.
- Saul, S., & Jürgensen, A. (2021). Handreichung für die Pflegeausbildung am Lernort Pflegeschule. Bonn: Bundesinstitut für Berufsbildung. www.bibb.de/dienst/publikationen/de/17389.
- Slotala, L. (2024). Internationalisierung als Innovation in der Langzeitpflege. *Zeitschrift für Gerontologie und Geriatrie*, S. 27-31.
- Wochnik, M., Krauß-Zenß, A., Reuschenbach, B., & Olden, D. (2025). Sprache fördern, Ausbildungsqualität sichern. Sprachbedingte Herausforderungen im Kontext von Migration. *Pflegewissenschaft*, S. 30-63.