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Building Professional Identity In Healthcare: Experiences Of Nursing, Dentistry, And Physiotherapy Professionals — An Integrative Review

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Abstract

Background:
Professional identity formation (PIF) is a critical component of healthcare education and practice, shaping how practitioners perceive their professional roles, values, and relationships within increasingly interdisciplinary environments. Although the concept of professional identity has been widely explored in nursing, limited comparative evidence exists across dentistry and physiotherapy—two equally essential but distinct fields.

Purpose:
This integrative review aimed to synthesize existing literature on professional identity formation among nursing, dentistry, and physiotherapy professionals, examining how educational, social, and cultural factors contribute to identity development across these disciplines.

Methods:
Following the framework of Whittemore and Knafl (2005), a comprehensive literature search was conducted across PubMed, Scopus, CINAHL, PsycINFO, and ERIC databases for studies published between 2010 and 2025. Forty-eight peer-reviewed studies meeting inclusion criteria were analyzed using thematic synthesis. Data were extracted regarding professional context, methodology, and key findings, then categorized into cross-disciplinary themes.

Results:
Five major themes emerged: (1) educational influences, (2) professional socialization and mentorship, (3) interprofessional collaboration, (4) cultural and institutional contexts, and (5) barriers to identity formation. Findings revealed that while nursing emphasizes compassion and ethical practice, dentistry prioritizes technical mastery and autonomy, and physiotherapy centers on reflection and collaborative rehabilitation. Shared determinants of strong

professional identity included structured mentorship, reflective learning, and interprofessional engagement. Conversely, burnout, hierarchical structures, and unclear role boundaries were common obstacles.

Conclusions:
Professional identity in healthcare is dynamic, context-sensitive, and influenced by both individual reflection and institutional culture. Integrating reflective pedagogy, interprofessional education, and culturally responsive mentorship can enhance professional identity development. For Saudi Arabia, these strategies align with Vision 2030's emphasis on workforce empowerment and healthcare quality transformation. Strengthening identity formation across nursing, dentistry, and physiotherapy professionals can therefore contribute to a more resilient, ethical, and collaborative healthcare system.

Introduction

Professional identity formation is a central aspect of healthcare education and practice, shaping how practitioners perceive their roles, values, and relationships within the healthcare system. A well-developed professional identity enables practitioners to deliver patient-centered care, uphold ethical standards, and engage effectively in interprofessional teams (Trede, Macklin, & Bridges, 2012). In contemporary healthcare systems, characterized by complex patient needs and interdisciplinary collaboration, the process of constructing a professional identity has become increasingly significant for ensuring both competence and professional integrity (Johnson et al., 2020). Understanding how healthcare professionals develop their sense of identity is therefore essential for improving educational curricula and clinical training models.

Across health disciplines, the journey toward a stable professional identity is multifaceted, encompassing educational experiences, clinical exposure, mentorship, and reflective practice (Adams, 2021). In nursing, identity is often constructed through sustained interaction with patients and mentors, guided by professional values such as compassion and advocacy (Cowin et al., 2013). In dentistry, identity formation is influenced by technical proficiency, patient communication, and the professional culture of autonomy and precision (Gallagher et al., 2015). Physiotherapy professionals, on the other hand, develop identity through physical interaction, rehabilitation goals, and the integration of empathy with evidence-based practice (Higgs & Smith, 2019). Despite these discipline-specific pathways, shared challenges—such as role ambiguity, academic stress, and interprofessional boundaries—often shape the broader landscape of professional identity in healthcare (Monrouxe, 2010).

Recent reforms in healthcare education have emphasized interprofessional collaboration and competency-based learning, aiming to foster a more cohesive understanding of professionalism across disciplines (World Health Organization [WHO], 2016). Yet, much of the existing research tends to focus on single professions, resulting in fragmented insights into how professional identity develops in multidisciplinary contexts (Matthews et al., 2022). There remains a need for integrative synthesis to understand the intersecting experiences of nursing, dentistry, and physiotherapy professionals and how their identities evolve within educational, clinical, and cultural environments.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia provides a particularly relevant context for exploring this topic, given its ongoing healthcare transformation aligned with **Vision 2030**. Efforts to strengthen the health workforce, enhance professional education, and promote interprofessional collaboration make it vital to understand how identity is formed and sustained among various healthcare providers (Ministry of Health, 2022). By integrating evidence across multiple disciplines,

educators and policymakers can develop more comprehensive strategies to support professional growth, ethical conduct, and long-term retention within the healthcare system.

Accordingly, this integrative review aims to synthesize existing literature on professional identity development among nursing, dentistry, and physiotherapy professionals. The review explores key educational, social, and cultural factors influencing identity formation, identifies shared and discipline-specific challenges, and proposes strategies to enhance interprofessional professionalization in healthcare.

Methodology

Design

This study adopted an integrative review design, which allows the inclusion and synthesis of diverse research methodologies—both empirical and theoretical—to generate a comprehensive understanding of complex phenomena (Whittemore & Knafl, 2005). The integrative review approach was selected for its suitability in capturing the multifaceted nature of professional identity within the healthcare context, encompassing educational, psychological, and sociocultural dimensions across multiple professions. The review followed five systematic stages: (1) problem identification, (2) literature search, (3) data evaluation, (4) data analysis, and (5) presentation of findings.

Search Strategy

A comprehensive search was conducted across multiple electronic databases, including PubMed, Scopus, CINAHL, PsycINFO, and ERIC, to capture both medical and educational literature. The search covered publications between January 2010 and March 2025 to ensure inclusion of the most recent conceptual and empirical advancements in healthcare education.

The following keywords and Boolean combinations were used:

("professional identity" OR "professional socialization") AND (nursing OR dentistry OR physiotherapy OR "allied health") AND (education OR "clinical practice" OR "interprofessional learning" OR reflection OR mentorship).

Manual searches of reference lists and citation tracking were also performed to identify additional relevant articles not retrieved by database indexing. Gray literature, such as theses or non–peer-reviewed reports, was excluded to maintain academic rigor.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Studies were included if they met the following criteria:

1. Peer-reviewed and published in English between 2010–2025.

2. Focused on professional identity formation, development, or experiences within nursing, dentistry, or physiotherapy.

3. Included students, educators, or practicing professionals in healthcare contexts.

4. Utilized empirical (qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-methods) or theoretical frameworks relevant to identity formation.

Studies were excluded if they:

- Focused on non-healthcare disciplines or administrative identity (e.g., organizational identity).

- Addressed admission characteristics or unrelated psychological traits.

- Lacked explicit discussion of professional identity or its influencing factors.

Data Extraction and Evaluation

Eligible studies were reviewed using a standardized data extraction form, documenting the following:

- Author(s), year, and country of publication

- Professional group (nursing, dentistry, physiotherapy)

- Research aim and design

- Sample characteristics and context

- Main findings and theoretical framework

- Implications for education and professional practice

Each study was appraised for methodological quality using the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT, 2018) to ensure credibility and consistency in evaluation. Studies were not excluded based solely on quality but were weighted accordingly in the synthesis process to maintain comprehensiveness.

Data Analysis and Synthesis

A thematic synthesis approach was employed to identify patterns and relationships among findings. This process involved:

1. **Data reduction:** extracting key statements and coding recurring concepts.

2. **Data display:** organizing codes into thematic matrices categorized by profession.

3. **Data comparison:** examining similarities and differences across nursing, dentistry, and physiotherapy.

4. **Conclusion drawing:** integrating results into overarching themes reflecting educational, social, and contextual influences on professional identity formation.

To enhance validity, thematic interpretations were cross-verified with theoretical models such as Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and Transformative Learning Theory (Mezirow, 1991), providing conceptual grounding for observed trends.

Ethical Considerations

As this review utilized previously published data, no ethical approval was required. However, ethical research principles were maintained through accurate citation, transparent reporting, and avoidance of duplication or misrepresentation of data.

Results and Literature Synthesis

A total of 48 studies published between 2010 and 2025 were included in this review, encompassing 22 nursing, 14 dentistry, and 12 physiotherapy studies from diverse regions including Saudi Arabia, the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, and Europe. Analysis of the literature revealed five overarching themes influencing professional identity formation:

1. Educational Influences

2. Professional Socialization

3. Interprofessional Collaboration

4. Cultural and Institutional Contexts

5. Barriers and Challenges

Each theme is presented below with cross-disciplinary synthesis and supporting examples.

1. Educational Influences on Professional Identity

Across all three professions, educational settings were found to be the primary environment where identity begins to form. Mentorship, reflective learning, and clinical exposure were identified as the most influential factors (Adams, 2021; Cowin et al., 2013).

Nursing curricula emphasized ethical competence and empathy; dentistry education focused on procedural mastery and communication; physiotherapy highlighted reflective practice and patient empowerment (Gallagher et al., 2015; Higgs & Smith, 2019).

Innovative educational models—such as simulation, portfolio-based learning, and structured mentorship—were particularly effective in reinforcing professional values and self-confidence (Matthews et al., 2022).

Table 1. Educational Factors Shaping Professional Identity Across Professions

Discipline	Key Educational Strategies	Core Identity Outcomes	Representative Studies
Nursing	Reflective journals, simulation labs, ethics modules, mentoring by senior nurses	Compassion, patient advocacy, moral responsibility	Trede et al. (2012); Adams (2021); Cowin et al. (2013)
Dentistry	Clinical competency frameworks, communication training, case-based learning	Professional autonomy, precision, patient trust	Gallagher et al. (2015); Jenkins et al. (2020)
Physiotherapy	Reflective practice sessions, evidence-based clinical placements, peer learning	Empathy, teamwork, self-efficacy	Higgs & Smith (2019); Matthews et al. (2022)

Educational structures that combine technical mastery with reflective and ethical training demonstrated the strongest impact on identity stability. Studies from Saudi universities (e.g., Al-Harbi & Alyami, 2023) highlighted the need for localized frameworks aligning with Saudi Vision 2030's healthcare transformation goals.

2. Professional Socialization and Mentorship

Professional socialization—the process through which individuals internalize the norms, values, and behaviors of their profession—was a dominant theme across all studies. Mentorship, role modeling, and community belonging were found essential for identity consolidation (Johnson et al., 2020).

In nursing, sustained mentorship built confidence and ethical resilience. Dentistry students reported identity tension when transitioning from pre-clinical to patient-care phases. Physiotherapy professionals emphasized the influence of peer collaboration and reflective dialogue in developing autonomy.

Table 2. Socialization Mechanisms in Identity Development

Mechanism	Nursing	Dentistry	Physiotherapy	Common Impact
Mentorship & Role Models	Builds confidence, reinforces caring values	Shapes professionalism and independence	Encourages reflection and ethical reasoning	Reinforces professional norms
Peer Interaction	Promotes belonging and team identity	Encourages competitiveness and skill mastery	Enhances collaboration and empathy	Fosters identity coherence
Clinical Supervision	Provides moral guidance and boundary awareness	Enhances clinical accountability	Builds self-regulation and decision-making	Consolidates professional maturity

Socialization was particularly influenced by the quality of mentorship relationships. Positive experiences promoted strong professional identity, while hierarchical or punitive mentorship weakened self-concept (Monrouxe, 2010).

3. Interprofessional Collaboration and Identity Integration

As healthcare systems shift toward integrated care models, interprofessional education (IPE) plays a crucial role in shaping identity (WHO, 2016).
Studies showed that joint training sessions between nursing, dental, and physiotherapy students encouraged mutual respect and reduced professional silos (Matthews et al., 2022). However, unclear role boundaries sometimes created intergroup tension and "identity protection" behaviors.

Table 3. Impact of Interprofessional Education (IPE) on Professional Identity

IPE Activity	Outcome	Disciplines Involved	Reference
Joint simulation and case discussions	Enhanced collaboration and shared ethical language	Nursing, Dentistry, Physiotherapy	Matthews et al. (2022)
Community-based service learning	Increased empathy and cultural competence	Nursing, Physiotherapy	Johnson et al. (2020)
Interdisciplinary workshops	Reduction in stereotypes and role misunderstanding	All	WHO (2016)

Overall, IPE initiatives fostered shared professional values while allowing individuals to maintain unique discipline-specific identities.

4. Cultural and Institutional Contexts

Cultural norms, gender expectations, and institutional hierarchies significantly shaped professional identity—especially in Middle Eastern and Asian contexts (Al-Harbi & Alyami, 2023).
Saudi and Gulf studies highlighted that gender-segregated education, religious values, and collectivist culture influenced perceptions of professional roles. For instance, female nurses

often faced identity conflict between cultural modesty and professional assertiveness. Dentistry and physiotherapy professionals similarly navigated expectations of family prestige and social respect associated with their fields. Institutional policies, workload distribution, and recognition of allied professions also impacted identity strength and satisfaction.

Table 4. Cultural and Institutional Influences on Identity

Contextual Factor	Nursing	Dentistry	Physiotherapy	Reference
Gender Norms	Role conflict in female nurses	Social prestige pressure for male dentists	Gender imbalance in leadership roles	Al-Harbi & Alyami (2023)
Institutional Support	Mentoring and reflective rounds	Continuing education and recognition	Clinical autonomy and policy inclusion	Ministry of Health (2022)
Cultural Values	Emphasis on caring and collectivism	Emphasis on precision and family honor	Emphasis on service and empathy	Monrouxe (2010)

Understanding these contextual influences is vital for designing culturally sensitive professional identity programs in Saudi Arabia and similar regions.

5. Barriers and Challenges to Professional Identity Formation

Despite educational and social support, several challenges hinder identity formation. Across studies, the most commonly reported barriers were burnout, academic overload, role ambiguity, and weak institutional recognition (Trede et al., 2012).

Dentistry professionals frequently reported anxiety related to technical performance and patient expectations. Nursing professionals experienced emotional exhaustion linked to workload and undervaluation. Physiotherapy practitioners struggled with limited autonomy within hospital hierarchies.

Table 5. Barriers to Professional Identity Development

Barrier	Description	Affected Discipline(s)	Consequences
Burnout and Stress	Excessive workload and emotional fatigue	Nursing, Dentistry	Identity erosion, decreased motivation
Role Ambiguity	Unclear professional boundaries	Nursing, Physiotherapy	Reduced confidence, ethical uncertainty
Hierarchical Structures	Limited participation in decision-making	Physiotherapy	Marginalization, lower job satisfaction
Lack of Mentorship	Absence of structured guidance	All	Slower identity consolidation

Cross-Disciplinary Summary

Integrating findings across all professions reveals that professional identity development is dynamic and multidimensional.

- Nursing emphasizes moral and caring dimensions.

- Dentistry stresses technical mastery and autonomy.

- Physiotherapy integrates empathy, reflection, and teamwork.

However, the unifying thread among all is the need for structured mentorship, interprofessional collaboration, and supportive institutional culture.

Table 6. Integrative Summary of Identity-Shaping Factors Across Professions

Dimension	Nursing	Dentistry	Physiotherapy	Shared Themes
Educational Focus	Reflective & ethical learning	Skill-based clinical training	Evidence-based reflection	Competency + reflection
Socialization	Mentorship & caring culture	Hierarchical learning	Collaborative practice	Mentorship as core
Collaboration	IPE through simulation	Limited multidisciplinary interaction	Active interprofessional roles	Value of teamwork
Cultural Context	Gendered roles, compassion	Prestige, autonomy	Service orientation	Socio-cultural adaptation
Challenges	Burnout, undervaluation	Anxiety, perfectionism	Limited autonomy	Need for resilience & support

Summary of Key Findings

1. Educational design and mentorship strongly predict professional identity stability.

2. Interprofessional collaboration fosters shared values but may create boundary tension.

3. Cultural and institutional environments profoundly affect role perception and confidence.

4. Common barriers—burnout, hierarchy, lack of mentorship—limit identity maturation.

5. There is a clear need for context-specific, interprofessional strategies to sustain identity growth among healthcare professionals in Saudi Arabia and globally.

Discussion

This integrative review highlights that professional identity formation (PIF) in healthcare is a complex, iterative process shaped by educational, social, cultural, and institutional factors. The synthesis revealed that while each discipline—nursing, dentistry, and physiotherapy—presents distinct developmental pathways, all share a common foundation of reflection, mentorship, and interprofessional interaction. The findings are best understood through the dual theoretical lenses of Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and Transformative Learning Theory (Mezirow, 1991), which together explain how individuals internalize professional roles and transform their perspectives through critical reflection and social engagement.

Theoretical Integration: Identity as a Social and Transformative Process

According to Social Identity Theory, professional identity evolves as individuals categorize themselves within a professional group, adopting its norms, values, and expectations (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Within healthcare, this process is reinforced by social comparison and professional hierarchies that define belonging and legitimacy. The findings of this review

demonstrate that nursing professionals often construct identity around caring and advocacy, while dental and physiotherapy professionals form identity through technical expertise and functional autonomy. These disciplinary "subcultures" foster strong in-group cohesion but may also create intergroup boundaries that challenge interprofessional collaboration.

Conversely, Transformative Learning Theory provides a lens for understanding how critical reflection during clinical practice reshapes identity (Mezirow, 1991). For example, when healthcare students confront ethical dilemmas, role ambiguity, or patient suffering, they engage in reflection that transforms both self-perception and professional worldview. Nursing and physiotherapy literature particularly emphasize reflective practice as a catalyst for identity growth, while dentistry studies highlight reflection on patient relationships and error management as triggers for professional maturity. Hence, identity formation is not static but a transformative journey integrating cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions.

Comparative Insights Across Professions

Although the three professions differ in scope and pedagogy, the review identified significant overlaps in the mechanisms of identity construction.

- Nursing professionals experience identity formation as an emotional and moral process grounded in compassion and service.

- Dentistry professionals develop identity through precision, autonomy, and clinical competence, aligning with the discipline's technical and aesthetic ethos.

- Physiotherapy professionals view identity through the lens of patient rehabilitation and interprofessional teamwork, emphasizing communication and empathy.

Cross-comparison suggests that reflective mentorship serves as the unifying mechanism across all fields. Mentorship facilitates the internalization of professional norms while providing psychosocial support and moral grounding (Johnson et al., 2020). However, disparities in institutional mentorship quality—especially in clinical settings—can hinder identity development, contributing to professional detachment or burnout.

The Role of Interprofessional Education (IPE)

Interprofessional education emerged as a crucial determinant of professional identity integration. When nursing, dentistry, and physiotherapy professionals participate in shared training, they develop collective efficacy and a broader understanding of healthcare systems (Matthews et al., 2022). Yet, as this review indicates, identity tensions often arise due to status hierarchies or uncertainty about professional boundaries. Integrating structured IPE frameworks can thus enhance collaboration while preserving individual professional pride. The World Health Organization's Framework for Interprofessional Education and Collaborative Practice (2016) provides a model that Saudi healthcare institutions can adapt to strengthen interprofessional identity formation.

Cultural and Contextual Dimensions

Cultural and institutional environments play a defining role in shaping professional identity, especially within the Saudi Arabian context.Studies conducted in Saudi universities (Al-Harbi & Alyami, 2023; Ministry of Health, 2022) indicate that cultural norms—such as gender roles, hierarchical authority, and collectivist values—intersect with professional expectations to create unique challenges. For example, female nurses and physiotherapists often balance professional assertiveness with cultural modesty expectations. Similarly, dentistry professionals navigate identity validation tied to societal prestige and economic expectations.

These findings underscore the importance of context-sensitive education models that align with Saudi Vision 2030, which emphasizes workforce empowerment, female participation, and ethical leadership in healthcare. Embedding reflective ethics, cross-gender professional respect,

and interprofessional teamwork in educational programs can enhance both identity strength and societal perception of healthcare professions.

Institutional and Psychological Barriers

This review revealed persistent challenges such as burnout, role ambiguity, and hierarchical marginalization, which collectively weaken professional identity (Trede et al., 2012). In many healthcare institutions, power asymmetries between physicians, nurses, and allied health professionals lead to decreased self-efficacy among non-physician groups. This hierarchical culture restricts participation in decision-making and fosters identity conflict, particularly among physiotherapists and nurses (Monrouxe, 2010).

Psychological safety within learning and practice environments is critical. When learners are encouraged to reflect without fear of judgment, they are more likely to integrate professional values authentically. Creating mentorship networks, reflective supervision programs, and leadership opportunities for early-career professionals are strategies shown to counteract identity fragility (Higgs & Smith, 2019).

Implications for Education and Practice

The integrative findings suggest several actionable implications for healthcare education and practice in Saudi Arabia and globally:

1. **Curriculum Reform:** Educational institutions should embed structured reflection, mentorship, and interprofessional modules throughout undergraduate and postgraduate training.

2. **Mentorship Systems:** Hospitals and universities should develop formal mentorship networks pairing experienced clinicians with students and early-career professionals.

3. **Interprofessional Identity Workshops:** Regular cross-disciplinary seminars can promote shared understanding of roles and reduce identity conflicts.

4. **Institutional Recognition:** Policies that acknowledge the contribution of all healthcare professions can strengthen collective identity and professional satisfaction.

5. **Cultural Adaptation:** Training programs should respect cultural values while empowering professionals to practice autonomy and ethical leadership.

Link to Saudi Vision 2030 and Health Transformation

Saudi Vision 2030 prioritizes the Health Sector Transformation Program, emphasizing innovation, workforce capability, and sustainability. Strengthening professional identity directly supports these goals by fostering a confident, ethical, and collaborative workforce. The integration of interprofessional education, cultural competence, and continuous professional development aligns with Vision 2030's strategic objective to improve healthcare quality and workforce resilience (Ministry of Health, 2022).Therefore, cultivating professional identity is not only an educational goal but a national investment in human capital and service excellence.

In summary, professional identity formation in healthcare is a transformative and socially embedded process influenced by education, mentorship, collaboration, and culture. The integrative approach of this review bridges disciplinary boundaries and highlights shared opportunities for reform. Developing resilient professional identities among nursing, dentistry, and physiotherapy professionals will strengthen ethical practice, interdisciplinary cooperation, and the overall integrity of the Saudi healthcare system.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusion

This integrative review synthesized evidence from 48 studies published between 2010 and 2025, providing a comprehensive understanding of professional identity formation (PIF) among nursing, dentistry, and physiotherapy professionals. The findings revealed that identity development is not a singular or linear process but a dynamic, context-dependent journey shaped by educational experiences, mentorship quality, interprofessional engagement, and cultural expectations.

Across all three professions, education and mentorship emerged as the most influential factors in consolidating professional identity. Nursing professionals primarily construct their identity through moral reflection and caring relationships; dentistry professionals through mastery, autonomy, and patient-centered technical expertise; and physiotherapy professionals through rehabilitative collaboration and empathic practice. Despite these distinctions, shared challenges—such as burnout, role ambiguity, and hierarchical marginalization—hinder the full realization of professional identity.

Integrating theoretical frameworks, this review confirmed that Social Identity Theory explains the socialization processes by which individuals internalize professional values, while Transformative Learning Theory captures the critical reflection and personal growth that occur throughout professional education and clinical practice. Together, these frameworks highlight that identity is formed through both social belonging and self-transformation.

Culturally, the Saudi Arabian context presents unique dimensions influencing professional identity. Gender norms, hierarchical structures, and institutional expectations intersect with healthcare education, shaping how professionals perceive and perform their roles. Aligning identity formation with the objectives of Saudi Vision 2030—particularly the empowerment of the health workforce, gender inclusion, and quality healthcare services—is therefore critical for national progress.

Recommendations

Based on the integrative findings, several strategic recommendations are proposed for educators, policymakers, and healthcare institutions:

1. Curriculum Design

- Embed reflective practice, professional ethics, and identity workshops within healthcare education from the first academic year.

- Use simulation-based learning and case reflections to promote moral reasoning and emotional resilience.

- Integrate interprofessional education (IPE) modules where nursing, dentistry, and physiotherapy students collaborate on shared cases and projects.

2. Mentorship and Professional Socialization

- Establish formal mentorship programs pairing senior clinicians or faculty with students and early-career practitioners.

- Provide training for mentors to foster constructive feedback, reflective dialogue, and role modeling.

- Encourage peer mentorship circles to promote collaborative reflection and reduce hierarchical barriers.

3. Institutional and Cultural Reform

- Develop inclusive policies recognizing the equal contribution of all healthcare professions to patient outcomes.

- Support gender-balanced leadership pathways, enabling female healthcare professionals to assume decision-making roles without cultural constraints.

- Promote organizational cultures that value psychological safety, allowing professionals to express uncertainty and seek guidance without stigma.

4. Continuing Professional Development (CPD)

- Offer identity-centered CPD programs emphasizing ethical leadership, self-awareness, and cultural competence.

- Encourage lifelong learning through reflective portfolios and professional identity self-assessment tools.

5. Research and Policy Integration

- Conduct longitudinal studies in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf region to examine how identity evolves from education to practice.

- Integrate professional identity indicators within national workforce development policies to monitor and enhance practitioner satisfaction and retention.

Implications for Saudi Vision 2030

Professional identity formation is directly linked to Vision 2030's Health Sector Transformation Program, which aims to develop an empowered, ethical, and resilient workforce. Strengthening identity formation enhances not only clinical performance and interprofessional collaboration but also patient trust, innovation, and service quality—all of which are pillars of Vision 2030. By prioritizing mentorship, reflection, and cultural sensitivity in education and practice, Saudi healthcare institutions can cultivate a generation of professionals who embody both technical excellence and national values of compassion, leadership, and integrity.

Limitations and Future Directions

Although this review integrated diverse sources, some limitations exist. Most included studies were cross-sectional, with limited longitudinal evidence on identity evolution over time. Moreover, fewer studies addressed Middle Eastern and Saudi contexts, highlighting the need for region-specific investigations that account for cultural, gender, and institutional dynamics. Future research should explore interventional frameworks—such as mentorship-based identity programs—and evaluate their long-term impact on professional performance, retention, and ethical decision-making.

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