

# **REFORMS IN NURSING EDUCATION: THE NATIONAL OPEN UNIVERSITY OF NIGERIA EXPERIENCE**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This paper examines the historical development of nursing and nursing education in Nigeria pre and post colonial era; the entry requirements into the programme and the current trends of the rush for the acquisition of a degree in nursing by majority of the nurses. It also goes to x-ray the reforms in nursing education in Nigeria and the roles and contributions of the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) in this process is critically examined.

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION/HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

Education is the process of helping an individual to discover, develop and make use of his inner abilities, potentials and capabilities for successful living in the society. According to Addison, (1662 – 1719) 'Education is a companion which no misfortune can depress, no crime can destroy, no enemy can alienate and no despotism can enslave'.

Following the Crimean War in 1854, Florence Nightingale initiated and sustained a campaign for nurses all over the world to have an organized formal training. This later had a positive influence in Nigeria which was at that time a British colony. By 1930, formal apprenticeship training started in Nigeria in some mission and government hospitals with standard six and secondary class four as

entry qualifications for Midwives grades II and I respectively with 1 year training period.

By 1946, the Nursing Council of Nigeria was formed and it laid down the requirements for education, examination and registration of nurses. The Council reviewed the admission requirements and training to a minimum of 3 years to earn a Registered Nurse Certificate (RN). There were post basic Nursing training in specialty areas such as Midwifery, Ophthalmic, Psychiatry, Orthopedics to mention a few.

In 1960, the Western Region government of Nigeria sent qualified nurses to train as Nurse Tutors, while the technical aids afforded some the opportunity to have diploma and degree. The return of these few paved the way for the commencement of degree programme in nursing at Nigerian Universities. Nursing profession took a significant leap in Nigeria with the establishment of the Department of Nursing at the University of Ibadan in 1965 with the mandate to produce teachers and administrators for the African region. This program improved nursing and also transformed the education and practice of the profession.

By 1972, the University of Ile-Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife) started the baccalaureate programme in Nursing in line with what operates in North America. This was targeted at fresh Secondary School leavers. Today, there are over 17 departments of Nursing in various Nigerian Universities running the Bachelor of Nursing Science (B.NSc) programme in line with the Ile-Ife programme. This programme is now the accepted curriculum by the National Universities Commission (NUC) for University based nursing programme.

Presently, 75% of practicing nurses in Nigeria are Certificate and Diploma holders. This chunk is eager to earn a degree and move beyond grade level 14. However, the conventional universities cannot meet the backlog of nurses willing to earn a degree owing to lack of space, strict admission criteria and other bureaucratic bottlenecks. The roles and contributions of the National Open University of Nigeria in assisting the nurses to earn a degree while on their jobs are elucidated in this paper.

## **2.0 REFORMS IN NURSING EDUCATION**

At the vanguard for reforms in Nigeria for nurses, is the Nursing and Midwifery Council of Nigeria. It was established in 1979 by Decree No 89 (Registration Act). This is the constituted regulatory body for the professional nursing and other specialty practices. The primary objectives of the Council are to ensure high quality of Nursing and Midwifery education in Nigeria, maintain high standard of professional practice and to enforce discipline within the profession.

In 1964, a new nursing education syllabus was approved with the ultimate purpose of ensuring a uniform standard for the profession. Today, admission to Schools of Nursing carries the minimum requirement of five (5) credit passes at not more than 2 sittings in: Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Mathematics and

English Language and the same is applicable to University Matriculation Examination candidates.

Nursing education in Nigeria takes cognizance of the National Policy in developing sound educational principles which are essential to the preparation of Nurses to function independently and/or as members of interdisciplinary and intersectoral teams.

The General Nursing programme is the basic education programmed for all nurses in Nigeria while others are offered at the Post basic levels. The programme forms the basis for the practice of Nursing and continuing professional development in the field of nursing.

The overall aim of reforms in nursing education in Nigeria is to prepare different cadre of competent nurse practitioners at all levels, who will utilize problem solving techniques in providing safe, acceptable, effective and affordable health services to meet the health needs of individuals, families and the community.

### **3.0 THE NATIONAL OPEN UNIVERSITY OF NIGERIA AND THE PROVISION OF UNDERGRADUATE TRAINING IN NURSING**

The National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) as a single mode tertiary institution is dedicated to quality open access education through distance learning.

The idea of an Open University for Nigeria, as a separate and distinct institution to be organized nation-wide was appropriately reflected in the National Policy on Education which stated emphatically and unambiguously that “***maximum efforts will be given to enable those who can benefit from higher education to be given access to it. Such access may be through universities, correspondence courses, or open universities, or part-time and work study programme***”.

Jegede, (2004) stated that “The National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) dedicates itself to preparing professionals in various disciplines through the distance learning mode. It offers a choice of qualifications from Certificate to Degree with self development courses through flexible delivery, allowing learners the convenience to choose the time, place and what to study”. This forms the basis of the university mission and vision.

NOUN admitted students into its nursing programme from inception for both the Pre-and Post-registration programmes. These crops of undergraduates were a hybrid of fresh School Certificate leavers and Registered Nurses (RN) respectively. These groups of undergraduates had few deficiencies in their entry qualifications and were asked to run and pass our access programme in the first year before proceeding to the appropriate levels of study.

However, the Nursing and Midwifery Council of Nigeria advised and put pressure on us to suspend the Pre-registration programme because

- This group of students are not trained nurses
- They are going to handle human life
- A regular and sustainable clinical training has to be put in place for them in government hospitals approved by the Council.

We have since complied and a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) is being signed with government hospitals that passed the checklist provided by the Council during inspection. These are located in the six geopolitical zones of the country and will be used by the undergraduates very shortly for clinical training.

### **3.1 STUDY CENTRES AND NURSING STUDENTS' STATISTICS**

There are 35 Study Centers across the six geopolitical zones in the country. These are the main centers of student learning activities at the NOUN charged with the responsibility to provide guidance, counseling and tutorials for students. 15 of these centres have been linked up with the satellite through collaboration with NASDRA. Others will follow suit. Each of the centres has a Study Centre Manager (usually of Professorial rank) who provides both administrative and academic functions in addition to the Counsellors and other support staff in the Centre. Instructional Facilitators (subject experts) are also employed on part time basis to provide the needed tutorials for learners (students) using the prepared course material as a guide. As of today, there are about 3750 students in the nursing programme across the 35 Study Centres.

### **3.2 ACADEMIC MANPOWER IN NOUN**

The National Open University of Nigeria has both the full time and part time academics as well as other support staff. The part time staff are carefully selected and posted to the Study Centres nearest to them to provide tutorials for the students. They are holders of at least a Masters degree in their chosen disciplines to facilitate courses assigned to them by the University and evaluate Tutor Marked Assignments. Examinations are conducted on semester basis while the category of staff mentioned above mark and return the grades to the Directorate of Examination for processing.

## **4.0 CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE NATIONAL OPEN UNIVERSITY OF NIGERIA TO REFORMS IN NURSING EDUCATION**

Within the short existence of NOUN and the establishment of the Nursing programme in the School of Science and Technology of the University, the latter has been able to contribute the following to nursing education:

- Provision of a solid foundation for the development of critical thinking that will allow for improved standard of education, practice

and research for nurses to contribute meaningfully and sustaining humanity.

- Provide viable access to as many nurses desiring to earn a degree in nursing without resigning their appointments. There are 3750 nurses on NOUN programme across the nation which accounts for what a conventional university will have in five (5) years or more. This will help to bridge the gap of the population of nurses who are desirous of a degree in nursing thus providing access to thousands of our citizens (by extension) that are constantly excluded from access to education because of the limited provision of schools and facilities and stringent admission measures.
- Provision of instructional materials for students by competent course writers who are subject specialists. There is a symbiotic relationship among the course developers and writers (made up of nursing educators, clinicians and field staff from universities running nursing programme) who through a combined effort produce the materials that are rich in scope, content and practice. This provides opportunity for wider acquisition of skills and knowledge by learners through the instructional materials.
- Provision of relevant educational system by building a cultivated society, advance learning and transmit the secular view of human beings which nursing equally belongs. With the open door for knowledge acquisition, the products of the university will become future leaders and provide the needed administrative and leadership roles in the health care industry.
- The formation of study groups which will assist the weak ones to make up for deficiencies. At the Study Centres, the Instructional Facilitators and Counsellors provide the needed support for learning and the use of Instructional materials which are learner centered and written with didactic andragogic effect to augment for more applicants to come in and study.
- Able to meet societal expectations, societal dynamics and provide utilitarian value to life which nursing also stands for through the provision of various courses and clinical attachment which will commence shortly.

## **5.0 CHALLENGES POSED BY THE NOUN NURSING PROGRAMME**

- The major challenges being posed by the NOUN nursing programme is the acceptability by the general public. It is anticipated that by the time the current student graduate, there will be a greater awareness of this programme among the populace.

- The clinical aspect of the education. NOUN has identified 22 Teaching Hospitals, Medical Centres and other government owned hospitals across the six geopolitical zones of Nigeria to serve as centres for clinical practice. There is need for nursing leaders who are serving as facilitators and preceptors for the nursing programme to be honest and committed to raising the standard of their profession. Nursing administrators in clinical areas should endeavour to ensure that their hospitals provide resources that will provide quality care. For effective nursing education, the clinical areas must be strengthened and nursing friendly.
- There is the need for the Nursing and Midwifery Council of Nigeria to understand and appreciate the peculiarity of the Open and Distance Learning (ODL) with regards to entry requirements and “giving maximum efforts to those who can benefit from higher education to be given access to it”.
- Research into the outcomes of our different nursing education programmes.

## **6.0 CONCLUSION**

The development and review of relevant curricular is very important considering Nigeria’s population, our growing and increasing need for higher education, as well as the demand by employers for knowledge renewal, it has become imperative for us to adopt distance and open learning to solve the enormous challenges of providing access to thousands of our citizens that are constantly excluded from access to education because of the limited provision of schools and facilities.

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