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Reforming of Nursing education in Nigeria: the open and distance learning institution approach

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Abstract

Reform is a deliberate plan for positive permanent change. It attempts to mitigate the evils resulting from malfunction of any system or set up which must be sustained. Reforming Nursing education in Nigeria is long overdue. The Nursing and Midwifery Council of Nigeria and other stakeholders in Nigeria education are in the vanguard for this with the overall aim of preparing 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. For efficient and quality education of nurses, quality health care, client satisfaction through utilization of evidence based practice, support for research and utilization among others; a paradigm shift in nursing education from hospital based training schools to institutions of higher learning/conventional mode to flexible, open and cost effective instructional delivery should be pursued. The National Open University of Nigeria- an open and distance learning single mode institution is committed to this. This will definitely make us to be confident and competent in the health care service delivery and justify our efforts in reforming the profession and the practitioners.

Key-words: *Reforming, nursing education, approach*

Introduction

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 (1672-1719) 'Education is a companion which no misfortune can depress, no crime can destroy, no enemy can alienate and no despotism can enslave'.

Historical perspective

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 had a

positive influence in Nigeria which was at that time a British Colony. By 1930, formal training started in Nigeria in some mission and government hospitals. Entry qualification for Grade II Midwives was Standard six with 1 year course duration, while that of Grade One Midwife was Government Class Four or Grade II Midwifery Certificate with two and half years duration. Later, general nursing came on board with entry qualification then as Standard six. The general nursing education was and is to a large extent apprenticeship training. By 1946, the Nursing Council was formed and laid down requirements for education, examination and registration of nurses.

The admission requirements to Schools of Nursing and Midwifery had to be reviewed over time in Nigeria by the Nursing and Midwifery Council of Nigeria being the regulatory body for training and practice in order to obtain equal status and reciprocity with their colleagues in other countries. Training in the Schools of Nursing provides sound education for the practice of nursing for a minimum of 3 years to earn a Registered Nurse Certificate.

There are post basic nursing education programmes that give training in specialty areas such as midwifery, ophthalmic, psychiatry, orthopaedics to mention a few. Today, the nursing education has grown systematically from being run through Schools of Nursing to the University institution. The developments in nursing education in Canada and the United States of America started to influence nursing education and practice in Nigeria. In 1960, in line with its health manpower development, the Western Region government of Nigeria embarked on a programme of sending, qualified nurses to train as Nurse Tutors, while the technical aids afforded some to have diploma and degree respectively. The return of these few provided a way for the commencement of degree programme in nursing in Nigerian Universities. Nursing profession took a tremendous leap in Nigeria with the establishment of the Department of Nursing at the University of Ibadan in 1965. It was originally designed to produce teachers and administrators to the African region but the improvement in Nursing caused by this programme transformed the education and practice of the profession. This was a unique programme that was embarked upon based on the need in Africa. By 1973/74

The University of Ile-Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife) started the baccalaureate programme in Nursing (that is the B.NSc programme) 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 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.

Break through in Nursing Education in Nigeria

Nursing education is the inculcation of necessary skills and knowledge to the person's intent to practice as a nurse. Olubiyi, et al² reiterated that nursing education gradually developed from informal training until it reached the form it takes today. Nursing education enhances the development of critical thinking and problem solving skills for clinical decisions making.

In spite of various review and improvement of the curricular, nursing education has remained hospital based. Consequently, a number of nurses in a quest for improved knowledge and in keeping with the Civil Service Policy had to embark on degree programme in health related courses like Health Education, Psychology and Nutrition to mention just a few in order to stay on in the service beyond Grade Level 14.

Many had left the profession out of frustration and dissatisfaction, as the qualifications RN, RM; RPN etc have no currency for entry into the general education courses in the Universities in spite of all the additional certificates. Presently, 75% of practicing nurses are Certificate and Diploma holders. Statistics of indexing in the Council shows a very marginal number of undergraduates from each university. The few ones in the administrative setting are graduates from the Schools of Nursing/Midwifery with long years of professional registration. The present conventional universities cannot meet the backlog of nurses willing to earn degree owing to lack of space, strict admission criteria and other bureaucratic bottlenecks.

National Policy on Education

In formulating the National Policy on Education in 1981, the Federal Government of Nigeria expressed awareness of the fact that "education is the most important instrument of change in any society". And that "any fundamental change in the intellectual and social outlook of any society

has to proceed by an educational revolution". It emphasized that "Federal Government shall undertake to make life-long education the basis/or the nation's education policy and that at any stage of the educational process after primary education, an individual will be able to choose between continuing his full-time studies, combining work with studies, or embarking on full-time employment without excluding the prospect of resuming studies later on ... The system will be restructured to develop the practice of self-learning.

The National Policy on Education is very explicit about the concept of Open and Distance Education. It describes it as a system which encompasses education for all, education for life, life long learning, life-wide education, adult education, mass education, media-based education, self learning, personalized learning, part-time studies, and much more.

Nursing education in Nigeria takes cognizance of the National Policy on Education in developing sound educational principles which are essential to the preparation of nurses to function independently and/or as members of interdisciplinary and inter-sectoral teams. Competence beyond graduation requires nurses to professionally recognize their limitation and seek appropriate education.

Several studies by WHO Technical Report Series 860 had been done which observe that nurses with more education deliver most cost effective care. Based on this observation, globally, nurses are increasingly seeking higher education and in general this trend is being encouraged³.

At the vanguard for reforms in Nigeria for nurses is the Nursing and Midwifery Council of Nigeria established in 1979 by Decree No. 89 (Registration Act) as the constituted regulatory body for the professional nursing and other specialty practice⁴. 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. Nursing as it is today started through the efforts of Florence Nightingale - the lady with the lamp during the Crimean War. 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 receives the minimum requirement of Five (5) credit passes at not more than 2 sittings these include: Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Mathematics and English Language. Nursing education in Nigeria takes cognizance

of the National Policy on Education 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 programme 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.

The National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN)

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"*. Jegede⁵, 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 universities mission and vision which are broadly explained in the objectives.

Objectives of NOUN

- ensure equity and equality of opportunities in education generally but specifically in university education
- provide a wider access to university education in Nigeria
- enhance Education For All and Life-Long Learning
- provide the entrenchment of global learning culture
- provide instructional resources via an intensive use of information and communication technology

- provide flexible, but qualitative education
- reduce the inconveniences, hassles of access to education and its delivery
- enhance more access to education.

Characteristics of Distance Learners

The following characteristics abound for distance learners:

- Adults most of who are well over age 20 - on the average they are older than students in the conventional university.
- Engaged in other work and social activities.
- Studies are centered on the learner. Learning is self directed. You do what you want to whenever you want to and how you want to hence the need for self discipline.
- There is learner autonomy as learners have a rich reservoir or pool of knowledge that can serve as a resource for learning. There is demonstration of problem centered orientation to learning as opposed to a subject-matter orientation⁶.
- Self motivation. Learners are generally motivated to learn from within (internally/intrinsically) as opposed to being obligated, or subject to, external or extrinsic forces.

Contributions of National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) to Nursing Education Reforms in Nigeria.

- NOUN provides 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.
- The University provides viable access to as many nurses desiring to earn degree in nursing without resigning their appointments. There are 3500 (35%) nurses on the programme across the nation which accounts for what a conventional university will have in 10 years or more. This will help to bridge the gap of population of nurses who require having degree in nursing and provide 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
- Instructional materials for students are produced by at least two course writers who are subject specialist. There is a symbiotic relationship among the course developers and writers (made up of

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 thus provides opportunity for wider acquisition of skills and knowledge by learners through the instructional materials.

NOUN provides relevance to the educational system by building a cultivated society, advance learning and transmit the secular view of human beings which nursing equally belong. 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 is one of the learners support services in NOUN will assist the weak ones to make up for deficiencies. At the centre, 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 and andragogic effect to augment for more people to come in and study.

The products of NOUN will be able to meet societal expectations, societal dynamics and provide utilitarian value to life which nursing also stands for through the various programme put in place. The writing of instructional materials is done in modules by educators, clinicians and field staff across the nation's universities. This development will in the nearest future help to produce acceptable document and help to reduce tension and rancour among academics. This singular act can lead to formation of group on nursing diagnosis such as NANDA in North America for research.

Centers and Nursing Students statistics

There are 34 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, counselling and tutorials for students. 15 of these centers have been linked up with the Nigerian Air Space Research and Development Agency (NASRDA), others will follow suit. Each of the centres has a Study Centre Manager who performs both administrative and academic function in

addition to the Counsellors and other support staff in the centre. Instructional Facilitators (subject experts) are also employed on part time to provide the needed tutorials for learners (students) using the prepared course material as guide. As of today, there are 3500 students in the nursing programme across the 34 study centre.

Academic manpower in NOUN

The National Open University of Nigeria has both the full time and part time academic as well other support staff. The part time staffs are carefully selected and posted to the study centers nearest to them to provide tutorials for the students. They are holders of at least Masters Degree in their chosen discipline to facilitate courses assigned to them by the University and evaluate tutor marked assignments.

Challenges posed by the NOUN programme

- The major challenge being posed by the NOUN programme is acceptability by the generality of nurses. It is anticipated that as the current students graduate, there will be a greater awareness of this programme.
- The clinical aspect of the education. NOUN has identified 22 teaching hospitals, federal medical centres and other government owned hospital across the six geopolitical zones of Nigeria to serve as clinical base for the 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 standards of their profession. Nursing administrators in clinical areas should endeavour to convince and ensure that their hospitals provide resources that will provide quality care. Today, so much is been spent on creating centres of excellence in health, purchasing expensive and complicated machines but not providing simple consumables that will help nurses to carry out nursing care. For effective nursing education, the clinical areas must be nursing friendly.
- Research into nursing education. It is time to embark upon research into the outcomes of our different nursing education programmes.

Summary/Conclusion

The development of relevant curricular and making

education accessible to larger sections of the society through distance mode is the two indispensable practical steps towards democratizing of education. In the foreseeable future, given the investment in education and continuous structural reforms in all sectors, illiteracy rate in Nigeria would have dropped to as low as 5 percent by the year 2020. Distance education has emerged as an instrument for democratisation of higher learning of education rather than for the maintenance of education as a privilege of the elite. There is a need to connect to NOUN at your own pace to enhance manpower development.

Considering Nigeria's population, our growing and increasing need for higher learning/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. Ndatsu⁷, noted that the crisis today in nursing education which includes: eligibility, admission, requirements, authenticity of certificates, may be as a result of the ordinances and edicts made by colonial masters with colonial orientation. The imperialistic tendency of these colonial masters has not put nursing in its rightful place in Nigeria.

As the society changes with newer concepts and scientific expositions with information and communication technologies as the main stream now in all life facets, it poses a challenge to nursing profession. It thus makes it mandatory to change from our traditional roles to the modern roles which are scientifically based. A paradigm shift in Nursing Education from hospital based training

schools to institutions of higher learning, conventional mode to flexible, open and cost effective instructional delivery which NOUN stands for must be pursued. This definitely will make us to be confident and competent in the health care service delivery and justify our efforts at reforming the profession and the practitioners.

The Nursing and Midwifery Council of Nigeria had started well. The joint efforts of the Council, the National Universities Commission and all universities involved in nursing education will help to sustain the good work and give nursing the pride of place it deserves in all human endeavours. This will definitely assist in laying a solid foundation for the development of critical thinking and help flourished the deserved respect arising from improvement in standard of practice, education and research.

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