



The Impact of Upgrading Basic Nursing Certificate to Baccalaureate Level in Ghana: A Comparative Analysis of Competency, Patient Outcomes, and Professional Development

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Abstract:

Objective: This paper aims to analyze the impact of upgrading basic nursing certificate to baccalaureate level education in Ghana, focusing on competency, patient outcomes, and professional development.

Method: A comprehensive literature review and thematic analysis of relevant studies were conducted to examine the potential effects of this educational upgrade.

Findings: The analysis reveals significant benefits of BSN education, including enhanced clinical competency, improved patient safety and care quality, expanded career opportunities, and better adaptation to evolving healthcare needs.

Conclusion: Upgrading to BSN-level nursing education in Ghana has the potential to significantly improve nursing practice, patient outcomes, and professional development.

Recommendations: The findings support the consideration of mandatory BSN education for nurses in Ghana, similar to the Nigerian model.

Significance: This paper contributes valuable insights to the discourse on nursing education reform in Ghana, providing evidence-based arguments for policymakers and stakeholders to consider in decision-making processes regarding the future of nursing education.

Keywords: Nursing education, Baccalaureate degree, Competency, Patient outcomes, Professional development, Ghana

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Introduction:

The landscape of healthcare is rapidly evolving, presenting complex challenges that demand a highly skilled and adaptable nursing workforce. In Ghana, as in many developing countries, there is a growing recognition of the need to upgrade nursing education to meet these challenges effectively. The transition from basic nursing certificate to baccalaureate level education represents a significant step towards enhancing the quality of healthcare delivery and improving patient outcomes.

Nigeria's successful implementation of mandatory BSN-level education for nurses provides a compelling model for Ghana to consider. The Nigerian experience has demonstrated significant improvements in nursing competency, patient care quality, and professional development (Agbedia, 2012; Ayandiran et al., 2013). This transition has enabled Nigerian nurses to better address the complex health needs of their population and adapt to technological advancements in healthcare (Owolabi et al., 2019).

The relevance of this analysis is underscored by the current challenges facing Ghana's healthcare system, including a high burden of both communicable and non-communicable diseases, resource constraints, and the need for a more robust and resilient healthcare workforce (Donkor & Andrews, 2011; Asamani et al., 2020). Moreover, the global trend towards higher nursing education standards necessitates a critical examination of Ghana's nursing education system to ensure it remains competitive and capable of producing nurses who can provide high-quality care in an increasingly complex healthcare environment (Bvumbwe & Mtshali, 2018).

This paper aims to analyze the potential impact of upgrading basic nursing certificate to baccalaureate level education in Ghana, with a focus on three key areas: competency, patient outcomes, and professional development. By examining these aspects, we seek to provide a comprehensive understanding of the benefits and challenges associated with this educational upgrade.

The specific objectives of this analysis are:

1. To assess the potential improvements in nursing competency resulting from BSN-level education.
2. To evaluate the impact of baccalaureate-prepared nurses on patient outcomes and safety.
3. To examine the implications for professional development and career advancement opportunities.
4. To explore the adaptability of BSN-prepared nurses to the changing healthcare landscape in Ghana.

Through this analysis, we aim to contribute to the ongoing discourse on nursing education reform in Ghana and provide evidence-based recommendations for policymakers and stakeholders considering the adoption of mandatory BSN-level education for nurses.



Significance of the Analysis:

This analysis holds significant implications for nursing and midwifery education in Ghana and beyond. By examining the impact of upgrading from certificate to baccalaureate-level education, it provides valuable insights into the potential benefits for competency development, patient outcomes, and professional growth. The findings underscore the importance of aligning nursing education with evolving healthcare needs and global standards (Bvumbwe & Mtshali, 2018). For Ghana, this analysis offers a compelling case for investing in higher nursing education to address challenges in healthcare delivery and workforce retention (Asamani et al., 2019). It also highlights the potential for improved patient care and safety through enhanced critical thinking and evidence-based practice skills (Anaman-Torgbor et al., 2022). Furthermore, the analysis contributes to the broader discourse on health education by emphasizing the role of comprehensive nursing education in addressing complex health issues and promoting population health (Asamani et al., 2020). By drawing on a wide range of literature, this analysis provides a holistic view of the potential impacts of upgrading nursing education, offering valuable insights for policymakers, educators, and healthcare administrators in Ghana and other countries facing similar challenges in nursing education and healthcare delivery.

Knowledge Contribution and Implications for Mandatory BSN Education:

This paper makes a significant contribution to the discourse on mandatory BSN education for nurses in Ghana, drawing parallels with the Nigerian educational system's approach. By synthesizing evidence from various studies, it provides a comprehensive analysis of the potential benefits of upgrading to baccalaureate-level nursing education, offering persuasive arguments for its mandatory adoption.

The analysis highlights several key areas where BSN education can significantly impact nursing practice and healthcare outcomes:

1. **Enhanced competency:** The paper demonstrates how BSN programs can improve clinical skills, critical thinking, and evidence-based practice (Salifu et al., 2022; Anaman-Torgbor et al., 2022), which are crucial for addressing complex health challenges.
2. **Improved patient outcomes:** Evidence suggests that higher nurse education levels are associated with better patient safety and care quality (Chien & Yick, 2016; Pitsillidou et al., 2021).
3. **Professional development:** The analysis shows how BSN education can enhance career opportunities, promote lifelong learning, and improve job satisfaction (Agyepong, 2018; Badu-Nyarko, 2023).
4. **Global perspectives:** The paper emphasizes the role of BSN education in preparing nurses for an increasingly interconnected healthcare system (Marfo & Urindwanayo, 2021).
5. **Adaptability to changing healthcare landscapes:** The analysis demonstrates how BSN-prepared nurses are better equipped to handle technological advancements and evolving healthcare needs (Donkor & Andrews, 2011).



By providing this comprehensive overview, the paper equips researchers and stakeholders with robust evidence to support the case for mandatory BSN education in Ghana. It offers a foundation for further research and policy discussions, highlighting the potential long-term benefits of such a transition for the nursing profession and healthcare system.

The paper's emphasis on the multifaceted benefits of BSN education aligns with global trends in nursing education and provides a strong rationale for Ghana to consider following Nigeria's lead in mandating BSN-level education. By drawing on a wide range of literature and presenting a balanced analysis, this paper contributes significantly to the ongoing debate and provides a valuable resource for decision-makers considering the future of nursing education in Ghana.

Method:

This study employed a comprehensive literature review and thematic analysis to examine the potential impacts of upgrading nursing education to the baccalaureate level in Ghana. This method was chosen for its effectiveness in synthesizing findings from multiple sources and identifying key themes, as demonstrated by similar studies in nursing education research (Bvumbwe & Mtshali, 2018; Salisu et al., 2020).

The literature search was conducted using multiple databases, including PubMed, CINAHL, ResearchGate, and Google Scholar. These databases were selected to ensure a wide coverage of both peer-reviewed articles and grey literature. The search terms included combinations of keywords such as "nursing education," "baccalaureate degree," "Ghana," "Nigeria," "competency," "patient outcomes," and "professional development."

Inclusion criteria for the literature were:

1. Studies published between 2000 and 2023
2. Articles focusing on nursing education in Ghana, Nigeria, or other Sub-Saharan African countries
3. Studies addressing competency, patient outcomes, or professional development in relation to nursing education levels

The selected articles were then subjected to a thematic analysis, following the approach outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). This involved:

1. Familiarization with the data
2. Generating initial codes
3. Searching for themes
4. Reviewing themes
5. Defining and naming themes



6. Producing the report

This method allows for a systematic and rigorous analysis of the literature, enabling the identification of key themes and patterns across multiple studies (Anaman-Torgbor et al., 2022; Marfo & Urindwanayo, 2021).

To ensure replicability, a detailed record of the search strategy, inclusion criteria, and thematic analysis process was maintained. This approach aligns with best practices in literature review methodology and provides a clear pathway for other researchers to verify and build upon this work (Pitsillidou et al., 2021).

Results & Findings

Competency Analysis

The transition from basic nursing certificate programs to baccalaureate-level education in Ghana represents a significant shift in nursing education, with profound implications for the competency of nursing professionals. This analysis explores the various facets of competency enhancement associated with this educational upgrade, focusing on clinical skills and knowledge, critical thinking and decision-making, evidence-based practice, cultural competence, and leadership and management skills.

Enhanced Clinical Skills and Knowledge

The upgrade to baccalaureate-level nursing education in Ghana is expected to result in a substantial improvement in clinical skills and knowledge among nursing professionals. Baccalaureate programs typically offer a more comprehensive and in-depth curriculum compared to certificate programs, providing students with a broader theoretical foundation and more extensive practical training (van Kraaij et al., 2023; Salifu et al., 2022; Bell et al., 2013).

The expanded curriculum of BSN programs allows for a more thorough exploration of complex health issues, advanced nursing interventions, and specialized areas of practice. This comprehensive approach enables nurses to develop a more nuanced understanding of patient care, disease processes, and health promotion strategies. For instance, Salifu et al. (2022) found that post-registration nurses in Ghana who had pursued higher education reported improved clinical competence and a better understanding of the theoretical underpinnings of their practice.

Moreover, the extended duration of baccalaureate programs provides more opportunities for hands-on clinical experience. This increased exposure to real-world healthcare settings allows nursing students to refine their practical skills and gain confidence in their abilities. Bell et al. (2013) emphasized the importance of adequate clinical exposure in nursing education in Ghana, noting that it is crucial for developing competent and confident nursing professionals.

The enhanced clinical skills and knowledge gained through baccalaureate education can have a direct impact on patient care. Nurses with more comprehensive training are better equipped to handle complex patient cases, make informed decisions, and provide high-quality care across various healthcare settings. This improved capability is particularly crucial in the context of Ghana's evolving healthcare landscape, where nurses often



need to adapt to new challenges and changing patient needs (Donkor & Andrews, 2011).

Critical Thinking and Decision-Making Skills

One of the most significant benefits of upgrading to baccalaureate-level nursing education is the enhanced focus on developing critical thinking and decision-making skills. BSN programs typically incorporate teaching methodologies and coursework that foster analytical thinking, problem-solving, and clinical reasoning (Reyes et al., 2013; Lassnigg, 2017).

Reyes et al. (2013) conducted a comparative analysis of cultural competence in beginning and graduating nursing students, which also shed light on the development of critical thinking skills. The study found that students nearing graduation demonstrated significantly improved critical thinking abilities compared to those just starting their nursing education. This improvement was attributed to the comprehensive nature of the baccalaureate curriculum and the emphasis on analytical skills throughout the program.

In the context of Ghana, the development of these higher-order thinking skills is particularly crucial. As noted by Donkor and Andrews (2011), the healthcare system in Ghana faces numerous challenges, including resource constraints and a high burden of both communicable and non-communicable diseases. In such a complex environment, nurses need to be able to think critically, make sound clinical judgments, and solve problems effectively.

The enhanced critical thinking and decision-making skills acquired through baccalaureate education enable nurses to:

1. Assess patient situations more comprehensively
2. Identify potential complications or risks more effectively
3. Develop and implement appropriate care plans
4. Adapt to unexpected changes in patient conditions
5. Contribute meaningfully to interdisciplinary healthcare teams

Lassnigg (2017) argues that competency-based education, which is often a key feature of baccalaureate nursing programs, is particularly effective in developing these critical thinking and decision-making skills. By focusing on specific competencies and their practical application, this educational approach bridges the gap between theoretical knowledge and real-world practice.

Evidence-Based Practice

A cornerstone of modern nursing education and practice is the emphasis on evidence-based practice (EBP). Baccalaureate nursing programmes typically place a strong focus on EBP, equipping nurses with the skills to integrate the best available research evidence with their clinical expertise and patient preferences (Anaman-Torgbor et al., 2022; Pitsillidou et al., 2021; Du et al., 2023).



In Ghana, the implementation of evidence-based practice in nursing has been a gradual process, with various challenges and opportunities. Anaman-Torgbor et al. (2022) conducted a study on evidence-based nursing practice in Ghana, highlighting the growing recognition of its importance in improving patient outcomes and healthcare quality. The study found that while there was a general awareness of EBP among Ghanaian nurses, there were significant barriers to its widespread implementation, including limited access to research resources and insufficient training in research methodology.

The upgrade to baccalaureate-level education addresses many of these challenges by:

1. Providing in-depth training in research methodology and statistics
2. Teaching skills for critically appraising research literature
3. Emphasizing the importance of staying current with the latest research findings
4. Encouraging participation in research projects and scholarly activities

Du et al. (2023) demonstrated the effectiveness of incorporating EBP education into nursing curricula, showing significant improvements in students' EBP knowledge, skills, and attitudes. While this study was not specific to Ghana, its findings are relevant and applicable to the Ghanaian context as the country seeks to enhance its nursing education.

The integration of EBP into nursing practice has far-reaching implications for patient care and health outcomes. Nurses trained in EBP are better equipped to:

1. Make informed clinical decisions based on the best available evidence
2. Implement effective interventions that have been proven through research
3. Continuously improve their practice by staying updated with the latest developments in nursing science
4. Contribute to the development of evidence-based guidelines and protocols

Pitsillidou et al. (2021) identified several factors that influence the application and implementation of EBP in nursing, including organizational culture, leadership support, and individual factors such as knowledge, skills, and attitudes. As Ghana transitions to baccalaureate-level nursing education, addressing these factors will be crucial to ensure that the enhanced focus on EBP translates into improved nursing practice and patient outcomes.

Cultural Competence

In an increasingly globalized world, cultural competence has become a vital skill for healthcare professionals. Baccalaureate nursing programs often include more extensive training in cultural competence compared to certificate programs, preparing nurses to provide culturally sensitive care in diverse healthcare settings (Reyes et al., 2013; Marfo & Urindwanayo, 2021).



Reyes et al. (2013) conducted a comparative analysis of cultural competence in beginning and graduating nursing students, finding significant improvements in cultural competence over the course of their education. This enhancement in cultural competence is particularly relevant in the Ghanaian context, given the country's diverse ethnic and cultural landscape.

Cultural competence in nursing encompasses several key aspects:

1. Awareness of one's own cultural beliefs and biases
2. Knowledge of different cultural practices and health beliefs
3. Skills in cross-cultural communication
4. Ability to adapt care practices to suit different cultural contexts

The upgrade to baccalaureate-level nursing education in Ghana provides opportunities to incorporate more comprehensive cultural competence training into the curriculum. This can include:

1. Courses specifically focused on cultural diversity and health
2. Integration of cultural considerations into clinical skills training
3. Opportunities for cross-cultural experiences through clinical placements or exchange programmes

Marfo and Urindwanayo (2021) discussed the importance of academic internationalization in nursing education in Ghana, highlighting how exposure to diverse perspectives and practices can enhance cultural competence. They argued that international collaborations and exchanges can broaden students' understanding of global health issues and prepare them to work effectively in diverse healthcare settings.

Enhanced cultural competence among nurses can lead to several positive outcomes:

1. Improved patient satisfaction and trust in healthcare providers
2. Better adherence to treatment plans due to increased understanding and respect for patients' cultural beliefs
3. Reduced health disparities among different cultural groups
4. Enhanced ability to work effectively in multicultural healthcare teams

As Ghana continues to develop its healthcare system and engage with the global health community, culturally competent nurses will play a crucial role in providing high-quality, patient-centered care that respects and incorporates diverse cultural perspectives.

Leadership and Management Skills

The upgrade from basic nursing certificate to baccalaureate level education in Ghana has significant implications for the development of leadership and management skills among nursing professionals. BSN



programmes typically include courses on leadership and management, enhancing nurses' ability to take on supervisory roles and contribute to healthcare system improvements (Donkor & Andrews, 2011; Bell et al., 2013).

Donkor and Andrews (2011) highlighted the challenges and opportunities facing nursing practice in Ghana in the 21st century, emphasizing the need for strong nursing leadership to address issues such as workforce shortages, resource constraints, and evolving healthcare needs. They argued that baccalaureate-prepared nurses are better positioned to take on leadership roles and drive positive changes in the healthcare system.

Key leadership and management skills developed through baccalaureate nursing education include:

1. Strategic planning and decision-making
2. Team management and collaboration
3. Conflict resolution and negotiation
4. Quality improvement and patient safety initiatives
5. Healthcare policy analysis and advocacy

Bell et al. (2013) analyzed nursing education in Ghana and identified priorities for scaling up the nursing workforce. They emphasized the importance of developing leadership skills among nurses to address the country's healthcare challenges effectively. The study suggested that baccalaureate programmes should incorporate leadership training throughout the curriculum, rather than confining it to specific courses.

The development of leadership and management skills through baccalaureate education can have several positive impacts on the nursing profession and healthcare system in Ghana:

1. Improved nurse retention: Nurses with leadership skills are more likely to find their work satisfying and remain in the profession, potentially addressing the issue of nurse migration (Asamani et al., 2019).
2. Enhanced interprofessional collaboration: Nurses with strong leadership and management skills can effectively collaborate with other healthcare professionals, leading to improved patient care and system efficiency (Asirifi et al., 2019).
3. Contribution to health policy: Baccalaureate-prepared nurses with leadership training are better equipped to engage in health policy discussions and advocate for nursing and patient interests at various levels of the healthcare system (Asamani et al., 2020).
4. Quality improvement initiatives: Nurses with management skills can lead quality improvement projects, contributing to enhanced patient outcomes and healthcare system performance (Anaman-Torgbor et al., 2022).
5. Mentorship and professional development: Leaders in nursing can serve as mentors to newer nurses, fostering a culture of continuous learning and professional growth within the profession (Asirifi et al., 2019).



Communication and Teamwork Skills

Closely related to leadership and management skills are communication and teamwork abilities, which are crucial for effective nursing practice. Baccalaureate programs often place a greater emphasis on developing these skills compared to certificate programs (Asirifi et al., 2019; Lawal et al., 2015).

Asirifi et al. (2019) explored the concept of preceptorship in clinical nursing education in Ghana, highlighting the importance of effective communication and teamwork in the clinical setting. They found that strong communication skills were essential for successful preceptorship relationships, which in turn contributed to improved clinical competence among nursing students.

Lawal et al. (2015), while not specific to Ghana, identified factors influencing the clinical learning experience of nursing students, emphasizing the role of effective communication and teamwork. Their findings can be applied to the Ghanaian context, suggesting that baccalaureate programs should focus on developing these skills to enhance students' clinical experiences and prepare them for professional practice.

The enhanced focus on communication and teamwork skills in baccalaureate education can lead to:

1. Improved patient safety through better handovers and team coordination
2. Enhanced patient satisfaction due to more effective nurse-patient communication
3. More efficient interdisciplinary collaboration in healthcare settings
4. Reduced workplace conflicts and improved job satisfaction among nursing staff

Adaptation to Technological Advancements

As healthcare continues to evolve with technological advancements, nurses need to be prepared to adapt to and utilize new technologies effectively. Baccalaureate nursing programs often incorporate more extensive training in health informatics and emerging healthcare technologies compared to certificate programs (Donkor & Andrews, 2011; Gyamfi & Gyaase, 2015).

Donkor and Andrews (2011) discussed the challenges and opportunities of 21st-century nursing practice in Ghana, highlighting the need for nurses to be competent in using health information technology. They argued that baccalaureate education should prepare nurses to engage with electronic health records, telemedicine, and other emerging technologies.

Gyamfi and Gyaase (2015) explored students' perceptions of blended learning environments in Ghana, which is relevant to nursing education as it incorporates technology into the learning process. Their findings suggest that exposure to technology-enhanced learning can better prepare nursing students for a technology-driven healthcare environment.

The enhanced focus on technological competence in baccalaureate nursing education can lead to:



1. Improved ability to use and interpret electronic health records
2. Enhanced capacity to engage in telemedicine and remote patient monitoring
3. Better understanding of data analytics and its application in healthcare
4. Increased readiness to adapt to future technological innovations in healthcare

In summary, the upgrade from basic nursing certificate to baccalaureate level education in Ghana has the potential to significantly enhance nursing competency across multiple dimensions. From improved clinical skills and knowledge to enhanced critical thinking, evidence-based practice, cultural competence, leadership, and technological adaptability, baccalaureate-prepared nurses are better equipped to meet the complex healthcare needs of Ghana's population. As the country continues to invest in upgrading its nursing education, it is likely to see substantial improvements in the quality of nursing care, patient outcomes, and overall healthcare system performance.

Patient Outcomes Analysis

The transition from basic nursing certificate programs to baccalaureate-level education in Ghana has significant implications for patient outcomes. This analysis explores the various aspects of patient outcomes that are likely to be influenced by this educational upgrade, focusing on quality of care, patient safety, documentation and continuity of care, and overall health outcomes.

Quality of Care

The quality of care provided by nurses is a critical factor in determining patient outcomes. Studies suggest that higher nurse education levels are associated with better patient outcomes, indicating that the upgrade to baccalaureate-level nursing education in Ghana could lead to substantial improvements in the quality of care (Chien & Yick, 2016; Agbokey, 2015).

Chien and Yick (2016) conducted a study investigating nurses' job satisfaction in a private hospital and its correlates. While this study was not specific to Ghana, its findings are relevant to the Ghanaian context. The researchers found that nurses with higher education levels reported greater job satisfaction, which in turn was associated with better quality of care. This suggests that upgrading nursing education to the baccalaureate level in Ghana could lead to a more satisfied nursing workforce, potentially resulting in improved patient care quality.

In the Ghanaian context, Agbokey (2015) examined job satisfaction among nurses in Ghanaian hospitals, focusing on the Kintampo municipal hospital. The study highlighted the relationship between nurses' education levels, job satisfaction, and the quality of care provided. The findings indicated that nurses with higher education levels were more likely to report higher job satisfaction and were better equipped to provide high-quality patient care.

Baccalaureate-prepared nurses may be better equipped to handle complex patient cases due to their more



comprehensive education (Salifu et al., 2022; Bell et al., 2013). Salifu et al. (2022) found that post-registration nurses in Ghana who had pursued higher education reported improved clinical competence and a better understanding of the theoretical underpinnings of their practice. This enhanced competence can directly translate to improved quality of care for patients with complex health needs.

Bell et al. (2013) analyzed nursing education in Ghana and identified priorities for scaling up the nursing workforce. They emphasized the importance of comprehensive education in preparing nurses to provide high-quality care in diverse healthcare settings. The study suggested that baccalaureate programs should focus on developing critical thinking skills, evidence-based practice, and cultural competence, all of which contribute to improved quality of care.

The improved quality of care resulting from baccalaureate-level nursing education can manifest in several ways:

1. More comprehensive patient assessments
2. Better identification and management of potential complications
3. More effective patient education and health promotion
4. Improved communication with patients and their families
5. Enhanced ability to coordinate care across different healthcare providers and settings

Patient Safety

Patient safety is a crucial aspect of healthcare delivery, and the level of nursing education can significantly impact this area. Baccalaureate-prepared nurses, with their enhanced knowledge and skills, may be better positioned to identify and prevent potential safety issues, thereby reducing medical errors and improving overall patient safety (Anaman-Torgbor et al., 2022; Pitsillidou et al., 2021).

Anaman-Torgbor et al. (2022) conducted a study on evidence-based nursing practice in Ghana, highlighting its importance in improving patient outcomes and healthcare quality. The study found that while there was a general awareness of evidence-based practice (EBP) among Ghanaian nurses, there were significant barriers to its widespread implementation. Upgrading to baccalaureate-level education could address many of these barriers by providing more comprehensive training in research methodology and critical appraisal of evidence.

The implementation of EBP is closely linked to patient safety, as it ensures that nursing interventions are based on the best available scientific evidence. Baccalaureate-prepared nurses are more likely to:

1. Implement evidence-based safety protocols
2. Recognize early signs of patient deterioration
3. Properly administer medications and treatments



4. Effectively communicate safety concerns within the healthcare team

Pitsillidou et al. (2021) identified several factors that influence the application and implementation of EBP in nursing, including organizational culture, leadership support, and individual factors such as knowledge, skills, and attitudes. As Ghana transitions to baccalaureate-level nursing education, addressing these factors will be crucial to ensure that the enhanced focus on EBP translates into improved patient safety outcomes.

The impact of baccalaureate-level nursing education on patient safety can be observed in various aspects of care:

1. Medication administration: BSN-prepared nurses may have a better understanding of pharmacology and drug interactions, potentially reducing medication errors.
2. Infection control: Enhanced knowledge of microbiology and infection prevention strategies can lead to better adherence to infection control protocols.
3. Fall prevention: Improved assessment skills can help nurses identify patients at high risk for falls and implement appropriate preventive measures.
4. Pressure ulcer prevention: A more comprehensive understanding of skin integrity and risk factors can lead to more effective prevention and management of pressure ulcers.
5. Early recognition of patient deterioration: Enhanced critical thinking skills can help nurses identify subtle changes in patient condition, allowing for earlier intervention.

Documentation and Continuity of Care

Proper documentation and ensuring continuity of care are essential components of high-quality healthcare delivery. Baccalaureate-level nursing education typically places a greater emphasis on these aspects, potentially leading to improved patient outcomes through better communication and care coordination (Okaisu et al., 2014).

Okaisu et al. (2014) conducted an action research project aimed at improving the quality of nursing documentation. While this study was not specific to Ghana, its findings are relevant to the Ghanaian context. The researchers found that targeted interventions to improve documentation skills led to significant improvements in the quality and completeness of nursing documentation. This, in turn, contributed to better continuity of care and improved patient outcomes.

In the context of upgrading nursing education in Ghana, improved documentation skills among BSN-prepared nurses can lead to:

1. More comprehensive and accurate patient records
2. Better communication between healthcare providers during shift changes and patient transfers



3. Enhanced ability to track patient progress and treatment effectiveness

4. Improved legal protection for both nurses and healthcare institutions

Continuity of care is particularly important in managing chronic conditions and ensuring smooth transitions between different healthcare settings. Baccalaureate-prepared nurses may be better equipped to:

1. Develop comprehensive care plans that address patients' long-term needs
2. Coordinate care across different healthcare providers and settings
3. Provide effective patient education to support self-management of chronic conditions
4. Identify and address potential barriers to care continuity

The enhanced focus on documentation and continuity of care in baccalaureate nursing education can have significant implications for patient outcomes, including:

1. Reduced hospital readmission rates
2. Improved management of chronic conditions
3. Enhanced patient satisfaction with care transitions
4. Better long-term health outcomes for patients with complex health needs

Health Literacy and Patient Education

An often-overlooked aspect of patient outcomes is the role of health literacy and patient education. Baccalaureate-level nursing education typically places a greater emphasis on developing nurses' skills in patient education and promoting health literacy (Donkor & Andrews, 2011; Badu-Nyarko, 2023).

Donkor and Andrews (2011) discussed the challenges and opportunities of 21st-century nursing practice in Ghana, highlighting the importance of patient education in improving health outcomes. They argued that baccalaureate-prepared nurses are better positioned to provide effective patient education due to their more comprehensive understanding of health promotion and disease prevention strategies.

Badu-Nyarko (2023) conducted a survey of continuing professional education of nurses in Ghana, which touched on the importance of ongoing education in enhancing nurses' ability to provide effective patient education. The study suggested that nurses with higher levels of education were more likely to engage in continuing education activities, which could further enhance their skills in patient education and health promotion.

The impact of improved health literacy and patient education on patient outcomes can be significant:

1. Better adherence to treatment plans: When patients understand their conditions and treatments better, they



are more likely to follow prescribed regimens.

2. Improved self-management of chronic conditions: Effective patient education can empower patients to take a more active role in managing their health.
3. Reduced hospital readmissions: Patients who are well-informed about their care needs after discharge are less likely to experience complications requiring readmission.
4. Enhanced preventive care: Educated patients are more likely to engage in health-promoting behaviors and seek preventive care services.
5. Improved patient satisfaction: Patients who feel well-informed about their health and care tend to report higher levels of satisfaction with their healthcare experiences.

Cultural Competence and Patient Outcomes

The diverse cultural landscape of Ghana necessitates culturally competent healthcare providers to ensure optimal patient outcomes. Baccalaureate nursing programs often include more extensive training in cultural competence compared to certificate programs, preparing nurses to provide culturally sensitive care in diverse healthcare settings (Reyes et al., 2013; Marfo & Urindwanayo, 2021).

Reyes et al. (2013) conducted a comparative analysis of cultural competence in beginning and graduating nursing students, finding significant improvements in cultural competence over the course of their education. This enhancement in cultural competence can have direct implications for patient outcomes in Ghana's multicultural society.

The impact of culturally competent care on patient outcomes can be observed in several areas:

1. Improved patient satisfaction: Patients are more likely to be satisfied with their care when they feel their cultural beliefs and practices are respected and incorporated into their treatment plans.
2. Better adherence to treatment: When healthcare providers demonstrate cultural sensitivity, patients are more likely to trust their recommendations and adhere to prescribed treatments.
3. Reduced health disparities: Culturally competent care can help address health disparities among different ethnic and cultural groups by ensuring that all patients receive appropriate and respectful care.
4. Enhanced health literacy: Culturally competent nurses are better equipped to provide health education in a manner that is meaningful and accessible to patients from diverse cultural backgrounds.
5. Improved mental health outcomes: Recognizing and respecting patients' cultural beliefs about mental health can lead to more effective mental health interventions and better outcomes.

Marfo and Urindwanayo (2021) discussed the importance of academic internationalization in nursing education in Ghana, highlighting how exposure to diverse perspectives and practices can enhance cultural



competence. This increased cultural competence among baccalaureate-prepared nurses can contribute to improved patient outcomes across Ghana's diverse population.

Long-term Health Outcomes and Population Health

While immediate patient outcomes are crucial, it's also important to consider the long-term impact of baccalaureate-level nursing education on population health in Ghana. BSN-prepared nurses are often better equipped to engage in health promotion and disease prevention activities, which can have far-reaching effects on overall population health (Asamani et al., 2020; Bvumbwe & Mtshali, 2018).

Asamani et al. (2020) examined the imperative of evidence-based health workforce planning and implementation in Ghana, highlighting the potential impact of a more educated nursing workforce on overall health outcomes. The study suggested that investing in higher nursing education could lead to improved health indicators at the population level.

Bvumbwe and Mtshali (2018) conducted an integrative review of nursing education challenges and solutions in Sub-Saharan Africa, including Ghana. They emphasized the importance of aligning nursing education with population health needs and argued that baccalaureate-level education is better suited to prepare nurses for addressing complex health challenges at both individual and community levels.

The potential long-term impacts of baccalaureate-level nursing education on population health in Ghana include:

1. Improved management of chronic diseases: BSN-prepared nurses are better equipped to provide comprehensive care for patients with chronic conditions, potentially reducing complications and improving quality of life.
2. Enhanced health promotion and disease prevention: A more educated nursing workforce can lead more effective health promotion campaigns and preventive care initiatives.
3. Better maternal and child health outcomes: Baccalaureate-prepared nurses may be better positioned to provide comprehensive prenatal, perinatal, and postnatal care, potentially reducing maternal and infant mortality rates.
4. Improved mental health outcomes: Enhanced understanding of mental health issues can lead to better recognition, treatment, and management of mental health conditions at the population level.
5. Reduced health disparities: A more educated nursing workforce may be better equipped to address social determinants of health and work towards reducing health inequities in the population.

In summary, the upgrade from basic nursing certificate to baccalaureate level education in Ghana has the potential to significantly impact patient outcomes across multiple dimensions. From improved quality of care and patient safety to enhanced continuity of care, cultural competence, and long-term population health outcomes, baccalaureate-prepared nurses are better equipped to meet the complex healthcare needs of



Ghana's population. As the country continues to invest in upgrading its nursing education, it is likely to see substantial improvements in both individual patient outcomes and overall population health indicators.

Professional Development Analysis

The upgrade from basic nursing certificate to baccalaureate level education in Ghana represents a significant shift in the professional development landscape for nurses. This analysis explores the various aspects of professional development that are likely to be influenced by this educational upgrade, focusing on career advancement opportunities, continuing education and lifelong learning, workforce retention and satisfaction, global perspectives and internationalization, and adaptation to the changing healthcare landscape.

Career Advancement Opportunities

One of the most significant impacts of upgrading to baccalaureate-level nursing education in Ghana is the expansion of career advancement opportunities for nurses. A BSN qualification opens up a wider range of career paths, including specialization and leadership roles, which are often not accessible to certificate-level nurses (Agyepong, 2018; Badu-Nyarko, 2023).

Agyepong (2018) explored the perception of non-professional nurses towards continuing formal education in Ghana. The study found that many nurses recognized the importance of higher education in advancing their careers. Participants indicated that obtaining a BSN degree would provide them with opportunities for promotion, specialization, and the ability to take on more responsible roles within the healthcare system.

Badu-Nyarko (2023) conducted a survey on continuing professional education of nurses in Ghana, which highlighted the role of formal education in career advancement. The study revealed that nurses who pursued higher education, such as a BSN, were more likely to:

1. Assume leadership positions within healthcare organizations
2. Pursue specialization in areas such as critical care, pediatrics, or oncology nursing
3. Engage in research and academic roles
4. Participate in policy-making and healthcare planning at institutional and national levels

The expanded career opportunities associated with a BSN degree can have several positive impacts on the nursing profession in Ghana:

1. Enhanced professional status: As more nurses obtain BSN degrees, the overall professional status of nursing in Ghana is likely to improve, leading to greater recognition and respect within the healthcare community and society at large.
2. Increased job satisfaction: The ability to pursue diverse career paths can lead to higher job satisfaction among nurses, potentially reducing burnout and turnover rates.



3. Improved retention of skilled nurses: By providing clear paths for career advancement, the healthcare system in Ghana may be better able to retain skilled nurses who might otherwise seek opportunities abroad (Asamani et al., 2019).

4. Development of nursing specialties: The increased number of BSN-prepared nurses can facilitate the development of nursing specialties in Ghana, improving the quality of care in specific areas of healthcare.

Continuing Education and Lifelong Learning

Baccalaureate nursing programs often emphasize the importance of continuing education and professional development, instilling a culture of lifelong learning among nurses (Badu-Nyarko, 2023; Ingwu et al., 2019). This focus on ongoing education is crucial for maintaining and enhancing nursing competencies in an ever-evolving healthcare landscape.

Badu-Nyarko's (2023) survey on continuing professional education of nurses in Ghana revealed that nurses with higher levels of education were more likely to engage in continuing education activities. This suggests that the upgrade to BSN-level education could lead to a more proactive approach to professional development among Ghanaian nurses.

Ingwu et al. (2019) investigated the perception towards mandatory continuing professional development programmes among nurses in Nigeria. While this study was not specific to Ghana, its findings are relevant to the West African context. The researchers found that nurses with higher educational qualifications had more positive attitudes towards continuing professional development and were more likely to participate in such programs.

The emphasis on continuing education and lifelong learning in baccalaureate nursing education can lead to several benefits:

1. Improved clinical competence: Regular participation in continuing education activities helps nurses stay updated with the latest evidence-based practices and clinical guidelines.
2. Enhanced patient care: Nurses who engage in lifelong learning are better equipped to provide high-quality, up-to-date care to their patients.
3. Increased adaptability: Continuous learning prepares nurses to adapt to new technologies, healthcare policies, and evolving patient needs.
4. Professional growth: Ongoing education provides opportunities for nurses to develop new skills and explore different areas of practice throughout their careers.
5. Contribution to the nursing profession: Nurses engaged in lifelong learning are more likely to contribute to the development of nursing knowledge through research and evidence-based practice initiatives.

Workforce Retention and Satisfaction



The upgrade to baccalaureate-level nursing education in Ghana has the potential to significantly impact workforce retention and job satisfaction among nurses. Higher job satisfaction levels are often reported among BSN-prepared nurses, which can lead to improved retention rates in the nursing workforce (Chien & Yick, 2016; Asamani et al., 2019).

Chien and Yick (2016) investigated nurses' job satisfaction in a private hospital and its correlates. While not specific to Ghana, their findings are relevant to the Ghanaian context. The study found that nurses with higher education levels reported greater job satisfaction, which was associated with better patient care and lower turnover intentions.

In the Ghanaian context, Asamani et al. (2019) examined the demographic shift in the nursing and midwifery workforce and its policy implications. The study highlighted the challenges of retaining skilled nurses in Ghana and suggested that providing opportunities for career advancement and professional development, such as upgrading to BSN level, could improve retention rates.

The potential impact of BSN education on workforce retention and satisfaction can be observed in several areas:

1. Increased job autonomy: BSN-prepared nurses often have more autonomy in their roles, which can lead to higher job satisfaction and commitment to the profession.
2. Enhanced professional identity: The comprehensive education provided in BSN programs can foster a stronger sense of professional identity among nurses, increasing their commitment to the field.
3. Improved work environment: As more nurses obtain BSN degrees, the overall level of expertise in healthcare settings may increase, potentially leading to more collegial and satisfying work environments.
4. Reduced intention to leave: Nurses with higher education levels and greater job satisfaction are less likely to leave the profession or seek opportunities abroad, addressing the issue of “brain drain” in the Ghanaian healthcare system.
5. Better coping mechanisms: BSN programs often include content on stress management and professional resilience, which can help nurses better cope with the challenges of their work (Agyare et al., 2018).

Global Perspectives and Internationalization

The upgrade to baccalaureate-level nursing education in Ghana provides opportunities for incorporating global health perspectives and promoting internationalization in nursing practice. BSN programs often include coursework on global health issues and may offer opportunities for international collaborations and exchanges (Marfo & Urindwanayo, 2021; Talley, 2006).

Marfo and Urindwanayo (2021) discussed the importance of academic internationalization in nursing education in Ghana. They argued that exposure to diverse global perspectives can enhance nurses' cultural competence, broaden their understanding of health issues, and prepare them for work in an increasingly



interconnected healthcare system.

Talley (2006) explored opportunities for creating collaborative opportunities between nurses and nursing education in Ghana and international partners. The study highlighted the benefits of international collaborations in enhancing nursing education and practice in Ghana, including:

1. Exchange of knowledge and best practices
2. Exposure to different healthcare systems and approaches
3. Opportunities for research collaborations
4. Development of global health competencies

The incorporation of global perspectives and internationalization in BSN education can lead to several positive outcomes for professional development:

1. Enhanced cultural competence: Exposure to global health issues and diverse healthcare practices can improve nurses' ability to provide culturally sensitive care.
2. Expanded career opportunities: Nurses with international experience or global health knowledge may be better positioned for roles in international health organizations or global health initiatives.
3. Contribution to global health: BSN-prepared nurses with a global perspective can contribute to addressing global health challenges and improving health outcomes on a broader scale.
4. Improved adaptability: Experience with diverse healthcare systems and practices can enhance nurses' ability to adapt to new situations and challenges in their professional practice.

Adaptation to Changing Healthcare Landscape

The healthcare landscape is continually evolving, with new technologies, changing patient demographics, and shifting healthcare policies. Baccalaureate-level nursing education is designed to prepare nurses to adapt to these changes more effectively than certificate-level programs (Donkor & Andrews, 2011; Bvumbwe & Mtshali, 2018).

Donkor and Andrews (2011) discussed the challenges and opportunities of 21st-century nursing practice in Ghana, emphasizing the need for nurses to be prepared for an ever-changing healthcare environment. They argued that baccalaureate education should equip nurses with the skills to:

1. Engage with emerging health technologies
2. Address the growing burden of non-communicable diseases
3. Participate in health policy development and implementation



4. Adapt to new models of healthcare delivery, such as community-based care

Bvumbwe and Mtshali (2018) conducted an integrative review of nursing education challenges and solutions in Sub-Saharan Africa, including Ghana. They emphasized the importance of aligning nursing education with evolving healthcare needs and technological advancements. The authors suggested that baccalaureate-level education is better suited to prepare nurses for the complexities of modern healthcare systems.

The enhanced ability of BSN-prepared nurses to adapt to the changing healthcare landscape can manifest in several ways:

1. **Technological proficiency:** BSN programmes often include more extensive training in health informatics and emerging healthcare technologies, preparing nurses to work with electronic health records, telemedicine platforms, and other digital health tools.
2. **Evidence-based practice:** Baccalaureate education emphasizes the importance of evidence-based practice, enabling nurses to critically evaluate and apply new research findings in their practice.
3. **Leadership in healthcare transformation:** BSN-prepared nurses are often better equipped to take on leadership roles in implementing new healthcare initiatives and driving organizational change.
4. **Interprofessional collaboration:** Many BSN programmes include training in interprofessional collaboration, preparing nurses to work effectively in multidisciplinary healthcare teams.
5. **Health policy engagement:** Baccalaureate education often includes coursework on health policy, enabling nurses to engage more effectively in policy discussions and advocacy efforts.

Scholarly Activities and Research

An often-overlooked aspect of professional development in nursing is engagement in scholarly activities and research. Baccalaureate-level nursing education typically places a greater emphasis on research skills and evidence-based practice, potentially leading to increased participation in scholarly activities among nurses (Roets et al., 2016; Almaze et al., 2023).

Roets et al. (2016) compared scholarship in nursing between degree-prepared nurses and diploma-prepared nurses. While this study was not specific to Ghana, its findings are relevant to the discussion of upgrading nursing education. The researchers found that degree-prepared nurses demonstrated higher levels of engagement in scholarly activities, including research, publication, and presentation at professional conferences.

Almaze et al. (2023) explored barriers and enablers to scholarship for post-basic nursing students in clinical service. The study highlighted the importance of higher education in developing research skills and fostering a culture of inquiry among nurses. The authors suggested that baccalaureate-level education could help overcome some of the barriers to scholarship in nursing practice.

The increased focus on scholarly activities and research in BSN education can lead to several benefits for



professional development:

1. Contribution to nursing knowledge: BSN-prepared nurses are more likely to engage in research activities, contributing to the development of nursing science and evidence-based practice.
2. Enhanced critical thinking skills: Engagement in scholarly activities can further develop nurses' critical thinking and analytical skills, benefiting their clinical practice.
3. Professional recognition: Nurses who engage in research and publish their findings may gain recognition within the professional community, potentially leading to career advancement opportunities.
4. Improved patient care: The application of research findings in clinical practice can lead to improved patient outcomes and healthcare quality.
5. Bridge between academia and practice: BSN-prepared nurses engaged in scholarly activities can help bridge the gap between nursing research and clinical practice, facilitating the translation of evidence into practice.

In summary, the upgrade from basic nursing certificate to baccalaureate level education in Ghana has far-reaching implications for the professional development of nurses. From expanded career advancement opportunities and a stronger emphasis on lifelong learning to improved workforce retention, global perspectives, and enhanced adaptability to the changing healthcare landscape, BSN-prepared nurses are better positioned for continuous professional growth and contribution to the nursing profession. As Ghana continues to invest in upgrading its nursing education, the country is likely to see significant advancements in nursing practice, leadership, and scholarship, ultimately leading to improved healthcare outcomes for its population.

Conclusion and Recommendations:

This comprehensive analysis of the potential impact of upgrading basic nursing certificate to baccalaureate level education in Ghana reveals significant benefits across the domains of competency, patient outcomes, and professional development. The findings strongly support the case for adopting a mandatory BSN-level degree for all facets of nursing and midwifery education in Ghana, following the successful implementation of such a model in Nigeria.

The analysis demonstrates that BSN-prepared nurses are likely to exhibit enhanced clinical skills, critical thinking abilities, and proficiency in evidence-based practice. These improvements in competency have the potential to translate directly into better patient outcomes, including enhanced safety and quality of care. Furthermore, the upgrade to BSN-level education offers substantial benefits for professional development, including expanded career opportunities, increased job satisfaction, and improved retention rates within the nursing workforce.

Based on these findings, we propose the following recommendations for implementing mandatory BSN-level education in Ghana:



1. Phased Implementation: Adopt a gradual approach to transitioning to mandatory BSN education, similar to Nigeria's model. This could involve setting a target date for full implementation while providing a transition period for current certificate-level nurses to upgrade their qualifications.
2. Curriculum Development: Collaborate with nursing educators, healthcare providers, and international partners to develop a comprehensive BSN curriculum that addresses Ghana's specific healthcare needs while aligning with global standards.
3. Faculty Development: Invest in the development of nursing faculty through advanced degree programs and continuous professional development to ensure high-quality BSN education.
4. Infrastructure Enhancement: Upgrade educational facilities and clinical training sites to support the delivery of BSN-level education, including investments in simulation labs and digital learning resources.
5. Stakeholder Engagement: Conduct extensive consultations with all relevant stakeholders, including nursing associations, healthcare institutions, and government agencies, to ensure buy-in and address potential challenges.
6. Financial Support: Develop scholarship programs and other financial aid mechanisms to support current nurses in upgrading their qualifications and to attract new students to BSN programmes.
7. Policy Framework: Establish a clear policy framework for the transition, including guidelines for accreditation of BSN programs and recognition of upgraded qualifications.
8. Continuous Evaluation: Implement a robust monitoring and evaluation system to assess the impact of the transition on nursing practice, patient outcomes, and the overall healthcare system.
9. International Collaboration: Foster partnerships with international nursing education institutions, particularly in Nigeria, to leverage their experience and expertise in implementing BSN programmes.
10. Public Awareness: Launch a public awareness campaign to educate the general public about the benefits of BSN-prepared nurses and the rationale behind the education upgrade.

By implementing these recommendations, Ghana can navigate the transition to mandatory BSN-level nursing education more smoothly, addressing potential challenges while maximizing the benefits for nurses, patients, and the healthcare system as a whole. This transition represents a crucial step towards enhancing the quality of healthcare delivery in Ghana and aligning the country's nursing education with global standards.

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