



## **Challenges and Opportunities in Implementing Nationwide**

### **Nursing Education Reforms: Lessons from Nigeria's**

#### **Experience**

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#### **Abstract**

**Objective:** This paper aims to analyze lessons learned from Nigeria's experience in implementing nationwide nursing education reforms to inform Ghana's potential transition to a Bachelor's degree as the minimum entry requirement for nursing practice.

**Method:** A comprehensive SWOT analysis was conducted based on literature review of studies related to nursing education reforms in Nigeria and other African countries.

**Findings:** The analysis revealed several key strengths and opportunities, including growing recognition of the need for reform, existing competency-based frameworks, and potential for leveraging technology in education. However, significant challenges were also identified, such as inadequate clinical training facilities, shortage of qualified educators, and the threat of brain drain.

**Conclusion:** Successful implementation of nursing education reform in Ghana will require addressing resource constraints, enhancing quality assurance mechanisms, and aligning curricula with evolving healthcare needs.

**Recommendations:** Gradual implementation, stakeholder engagement, investment in infrastructure and faculty development, and partnerships with international institutions are recommended.

**Significance:** This analysis provides valuable insights for policymakers and educators in Ghana, contributing to evidence-based decision-making in nursing education reform and broader healthcare policy.

**Keywords:** Nursing education reform, Bachelor's degree, Ghana, Nigeria, SWOT analysis

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## Introduction

The landscape of healthcare is rapidly evolving, necessitating corresponding advancements in nursing education to ensure the provision of high-quality patient care. In Ghana, as in many African countries, there is a growing recognition of the need to elevate the standard of nursing education to meet these evolving healthcare demands. The consideration of implementing a nationwide nursing education reform to make the Bachelor of Nursing and Midwifery or Allied Health the standard entry or minimum requirement for nursing practice in Ghana is a significant step towards this goal.

This analysis draws valuable insights from Nigeria's experience in implementing similar nursing education reforms. Nigeria, as a fellow West African nation with comparable healthcare challenges and socioeconomic contexts, provides a relevant case study for Ghana to learn from and adapt. The Nigerian experience, as documented in various studies, offers a wealth of information on the challenges, opportunities, and potential pitfalls in implementing such far-reaching educational reforms.

Ayandiran et al. (2013) highlighted the complexities of nursing education reforms in Nigeria, emphasizing the need for a responsive and adaptive approach [10]. Similarly, Agbedia (2012) stressed the importance of re-envisioning nursing education for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, aligning curricula with both global standards and local healthcare needs [2]. These studies, among others, provide a foundation for understanding the multifaceted nature of nursing education reform and its implications for healthcare delivery.

The main purpose of this analysis is to examine the lessons learned from Nigeria's experience in implementing nationwide nursing education reforms and apply these insights to inform Ghana's potential transition to a Bachelor's degree as the minimum entry requirement for nursing practice.

Specific objectives informing this analysis include:

1. To identify the key strengths and opportunities that can be leveraged in implementing nursing education reform in Ghana, based on Nigeria's experience.
2. To anticipate potential challenges and threats in the implementation process, drawing from the Nigerian context.
3. To propose strategies for successful implementation of nursing education reform in Ghana, informed by the successes and shortcomings observed in Nigeria.

By critically examining Nigeria's journey in nursing education reform, this analysis aims to provide valuable insights and recommendations for policymakers, educators, and healthcare administrators in Ghana as they consider and potentially implement similar reforms.

## Significance of the Paper

This paper holds significant importance for nursing, midwifery, and health education in Ghana, as well as for



healthcare research at large. Firstly, it provides a comprehensive analysis of the potential impacts of elevating the minimum educational requirement for nursing practice, drawing on real-world experiences from a comparable context. This can inform evidence-based decision-making in Ghana's healthcare education policy.

Secondly, by identifying potential challenges and opportunities, this paper can help stakeholders in Ghana's nursing education sector to proactively address issues and capitalize on strengths, potentially leading to a smoother implementation process if reforms are adopted.

Thirdly, the insights gained from this analysis can contribute to the broader discourse on nursing education reform in Africa, providing valuable comparative data for other countries considering similar changes.

For healthcare research, this paper demonstrates the value of cross-country learning and the application of lessons from one context to another. It also highlights the importance of comprehensive analysis in informing major policy decisions in healthcare education.

Lastly, by focusing on the transition to a Bachelor's degree as the minimum requirement, this paper contributes to the ongoing global conversation about the professionalization of nursing and its impact on healthcare quality and patient outcomes.

## **Method:**

The SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) framework was employed in this paper to provide a comprehensive and structured analysis of the potential implementation of nationwide nursing education reforms in Ghana, drawing lessons from Nigeria's experience. This analytical tool was chosen for its ability to offer a holistic view of both internal and external factors that could impact the success of such reforms.

The SWOT analysis was conducted based on a thorough review of literature related to nursing education reforms in Nigeria and other African countries. Each component of the SWOT framework was populated with insights drawn from various studies:

**Strengths:** The analysis identified key strengths such as the growing recognition of the need for reform [2, 10] and existing competency-based frameworks [23, 24].

**Weaknesses:** Critical weaknesses were highlighted, including inadequate clinical training facilities [17, 18] and shortage of qualified educators [8, 25].

**Opportunities:** Potential opportunities were identified, such as the integration of technology in education [20, 28] and the growing interest in advanced practice nursing roles [30, 42].

**Threats:** Significant threats were analyzed, including brain drain and nurse migration [46, 47] and the rapidly changing healthcare landscape [29].

The SWOT framework effectively addressed the paper's objectives by:



1. Identifying key strengths and opportunities that Ghana can leverage, fulfilling the first objective.
2. Anticipating potential challenges and threats, addressing the second objective.
3. Informing strategies for successful implementation, meeting the third objective.

This method was particularly suitable for this paper as it allowed for a balanced consideration of both positive and negative factors, internal and external influences, providing a comprehensive picture of the potential reform landscape. The SWOT analysis facilitated a systematic approach to synthesizing diverse information from multiple sources, making it an effective tool for this complex topic.

Researchers aiming to replicate this method in similar studies should:

1. Conduct a thorough literature review to gather relevant data.
2. Categorize findings into the four SWOT components.
3. Analyze how each factor could impact the proposed reforms.
4. Use the SWOT findings to inform recommendations and strategies.

This approach allows for a structured yet flexible analysis that can be adapted to different contexts and healthcare education reform scenarios.

## Results & Findings

### SWOT Analysis

#### Strengths:

1. Growing recognition of the need for nursing education reform:

The nursing profession in Nigeria and other African countries has increasingly acknowledged the necessity for comprehensive educational reforms to meet evolving healthcare demands. Agbedia (2012) highlights the importance of re-envisioning nursing education in Nigeria for the 21st century, emphasizing the need to align curricula with global standards and local healthcare needs [2]. This recognition is crucial for driving change and improvement in nursing education.

Ayandiran et al. (2013) further elaborate on the responsiveness of the nursing profession to education reforms in Nigeria, noting that while challenges exist, there is a growing awareness of the need to adapt to changing healthcare landscapes [10]. This awareness forms a strong foundation for implementing meaningful reforms in nursing education.

2. Existing frameworks for competency-based education in nursing:

The development of competency-based curricula represents a significant strength in nursing education reform



efforts. The World Health Organization (WHO) has provided a comprehensive four-year integrated nursing and midwifery competency-based curriculum, which serves as a valuable resource for countries looking to reform their nursing education systems [23]. This framework offers a standardized approach to ensuring that nursing graduates possess the necessary skills and knowledge to provide quality healthcare.

Gravina (2016) discusses the positive effects of competency-based education on nursing, highlighting its potential to improve learning outcomes and better prepare nurses for real-world practice [24]. The adoption of such frameworks can enhance the quality and relevance of nursing education in Nigeria and other African countries.

### 3. Increasing adoption of technology in nursing education:

The integration of technology in nursing education represents a significant strength, offering new opportunities for learning and skill development. Essel & Owusu-Boateng (2011) describe the successful use of technologies for scaling up open and distance learning programs at the Institute of Distance Learning, KNUST, in Ghana [20]. This demonstrates the potential for leveraging technology to expand access to nursing education and improve learning outcomes.

Similarly, Gyamfi & Gyaase (2015) explore students' perceptions of blended learning environments in Ghana, finding that such approaches can enhance the learning experience and provide greater flexibility for students [28]. The adoption of these technological innovations in nursing education can help address issues of access and quality, particularly in resource-constrained settings.

### 4. Efforts to integrate nursing process into patient care:

The implementation of the nursing process in patient care represents a strength in nursing education and practice. Osman et al. (2021) examine the use of the nursing process for patient care in a Ghanaian teaching hospital, highlighting its importance in providing systematic and individualized care [36]. This focus on the nursing process in education and practice helps to ensure that nurses are equipped with critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

Ofi & Sowunmi (2012) discuss the experiences of using the nursing process model in selected hospitals in Ibadan, Nigeria, noting both successes and challenges in its implementation [37]. The continued emphasis on the nursing process in education and practice strengthens the overall quality of nursing care and helps to bridge the gap between theory and practice.

### 5. Development of advanced practice nursing roles:

The emergence and development of advanced practice nursing roles represent a significant strength in the evolution of nursing education and practice. Davis (2017) discusses the essentials for role development in advanced practice nursing, highlighting the importance of specialized education and training for these roles [30]. The recognition and development of advanced practice nursing can elevate the profession and improve healthcare delivery.



Chimezie & Ibe (2019) specifically explore advanced practice nursing in Nigeria, discussing its potential to address healthcare challenges and improve patient outcomes [42]. The growth of advanced practice nursing roles necessitates corresponding advancements in nursing education, driving overall improvement in the field.

## 6. Focus on continuing nursing education:

The emphasis on continuing nursing education (CNE) is a notable strength in the nursing profession. Maziah et al. (2012) discuss best practice initiatives in nursing practice environments, highlighting the role of CNE in maintaining and improving nursing competencies [32]. This focus on ongoing learning and professional development helps to ensure that nurses stay up-to-date with the latest advancements in healthcare.

Bit-Lian et al. (2022) examine factors affecting participation in CNE among registered nurses in Malaysia, providing insights that can be applied to improve CNE programs in other countries, including Nigeria [33]. The commitment to lifelong learning in nursing strengthens the profession and enhances the quality of patient care.

## 7. Efforts to improve clinical training:

Despite challenges, there are ongoing efforts to enhance clinical training for nursing students, which represent a strength in nursing education reform. Anarado et al. (2016) identify factors hindering clinical training of students in selected nursing educational institutions in Southeastern Nigeria, providing valuable insights for improvement [17]. These efforts to understand and address challenges in clinical training can lead to more effective educational practices.

Muthathi et al. (2017) explore best practices in clinical facilitation through the eyes of students, offering recommendations for improving the clinical learning experience [31]. These insights can be leveraged to strengthen clinical training components of nursing education programs.

## 8. Growing interest in quality assurance:

The increasing focus on quality assurance in nursing education is a significant strength. Mgbekem & Samson-Akpan (2007) emphasize the absolute necessity of quality assurance in nursing education, highlighting its importance in maintaining standards and improving educational outcomes [38]. This attention to quality can drive continuous improvement in nursing education programs.

## 9. Adaptation to local contexts:

The efforts to adapt nursing education to local healthcare needs and contexts represent a strength in reform initiatives. Adejumo & Ehlers (2001) compare models of psychiatric nursing education in Botswana and Nigeria, demonstrating the importance of considering local factors in nursing education [1]. This focus on context-specific education ensures that nursing graduates are well-prepared to address the unique healthcare challenges in their communities.

## 10. Integration of research skills:



The increasing emphasis on research skills in nursing education is a notable strength. Ajanaku & Mutula (2021) discuss knowledge management enablers affecting patient care from the perspective of registered nurses in South West Nigeria, highlighting the importance of research and evidence-based practice [4]. Integrating research skills into nursing education enhances critical thinking and promotes evidence-based practice.

These strengths provided a solid foundation for implementing nationwide nursing education reforms in Nigeria and other African countries. The growing recognition of the need for reform, coupled with the development of competency-based frameworks and the integration of technology, offers significant opportunities for improvement. The focus on the nursing process, advanced practice roles, and continuing education further strengthens the profession. Efforts to enhance clinical training, ensure quality assurance, and adapt education to local contexts demonstrate a commitment to excellence in nursing education. By leveraging these strengths, Ghana and other countries can work towards creating more robust, effective, and responsive nursing education systems that meet the evolving healthcare needs of their populations.

## Weaknesses

### 1. Inadequate clinical training facilities and opportunities:

One of the most significant weaknesses in nursing education in Nigeria and many African countries is the lack of adequate clinical training facilities and opportunities. Anarado et al. (2016) conducted a study in Southeastern Nigeria that identified several factors hindering clinical training of nursing students [17]. These factors included insufficient clinical placement sites, overcrowding of students in available facilities, and a lack of modern equipment and supplies. The study highlighted that these limitations significantly impacted the quality of hands-on experience students could gain during their training.

Similarly, Hakim (2023) investigated the challenges of clinical education from the viewpoint of nursing educators and students in a cross-sectional study [18]. The findings revealed that inadequate clinical environments, lack of appropriate patients for learning specific skills, and limited time for clinical practice were major obstacles. These issues can lead to a gap between theoretical knowledge and practical skills, potentially affecting the competence of newly graduated nurses.

### 2. Shortage of qualified nursing educators:

The scarcity of qualified nursing educators is another critical weakness in the nursing education system. Tamata & Mohammadnezhad (2023) conducted a systematic review on factors affecting the shortage of nursing workforce in hospitals, which also highlighted the cascading effect on nursing education [8]. The shortage of experienced nurses in clinical settings directly impacts the availability of potential educators, creating a cycle of inadequate training and workforce shortages.

Ezeonwu (2013) specifically examined nursing education and workforce development implications for maternal health in Anambra State, Nigeria [25]. The study pointed out that the shortage of nursing faculty was a significant barrier to expanding nursing education programs and improving the quality of instruction.



This shortage often results in high student-to-faculty ratios, limiting the individual attention and mentorship students can receive.

### 3. Limited resources and infrastructure in nursing schools:

Resource constraints and inadequate infrastructure in nursing schools pose significant challenges to the delivery of quality education. Bvumbwe & Mtshali (2018) conducted an integrative review of nursing education challenges and solutions in Sub-Saharan Africa, highlighting the pervasive issue of limited resources [13]. Their findings revealed that many nursing schools lack basic teaching and learning materials, up-to-date textbooks, and essential laboratory equipment.

Msiska et al. (2014) explored the “lifeworld” of Malawian undergraduate student nurses, emphasizing the challenge of learning in resource-poor clinical settings [35]. The study described how limited resources not only affected the quality of education but also impacted students’ motivation and self-efficacy. These resource constraints can lead to a reliance on outdated teaching methods and limit students' exposure to modern healthcare technologies and practices.

### 4. Challenges in implementing the nursing process in practice:

While the nursing process is a fundamental aspect of nursing education and practice, its implementation in real-world settings often faces significant challenges. Zamanzadeh et al. (2015) conducted a systematic review of the challenges associated with the implementation of the nursing process [40]. The review identified several barriers, including lack of knowledge, negative attitude towards the nursing process, poor management support, and time constraints.

Adrar & Mengistu (2020) investigated the implementation and factors affecting the nursing process among nurses working in selected government hospitals in Southwest Ethiopia [48]. Their study revealed that while many nurses had theoretical knowledge of the nursing process, its practical application was limited due to high patient loads, inadequate resources, and lack of institutional support. These challenges highlight a disconnect between nursing education and the realities of clinical practice, potentially compromising the quality of patient care.

### 5. Examination malpractice issues:

Examination malpractice is a significant weakness that undermines the integrity of nursing education. Alabi & Abdulkareem (2012) addressed this issue in the context of Nigerian universities, proposing strategic management policies to combat examination malpractice [5]. The prevalence of such practices not only questions the validity of assessments but also potentially allows underqualified individuals to progress through the education system, ultimately affecting the quality of the nursing workforce.

### 6. Disconnect between theory and practice:

A recurring weakness in nursing education is the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application. Missen et al. (2016) conducted a systematic integrative review of registered nurses' perceptions of new





nursing graduates' clinical competence [34]. The review highlighted concerns about the readiness of new graduates for clinical practice, suggesting a misalignment between educational outcomes and workplace expectations.

This disconnect is further emphasized by Ajemba et al. (2022), who studied factors influencing the implementation of the nursing process among nurses in a teaching hospital in Anambra State [6]. Their findings indicated that while nurses received theoretical training on the nursing process, its practical application was often hindered by workplace realities, suggesting a need for more practice-oriented education.

## 7. Limited adoption of competency-based education:

Despite the recognition of its importance, the adoption of competency-based education (CBE) in nursing programs remains limited in many African countries. Ige et al. (2023) proposed a protocol for a scoping review on the implementation of competency-based education for quality midwifery programs in Africa [22]. The need for such a review indicates that the adoption of CBE is still in its early stages and faces implementation challenges.

Gravina (2016) reviewed the effect of competency-based education on nursing education, highlighting both its potential benefits and the challenges in its implementation [24]. The limited adoption of CBE represents a missed opportunity to align nursing education more closely with the skills and competencies required in modern healthcare settings.

## 8. Inadequate focus on specialized nursing fields:

Many nursing education programs in Nigeria and other African countries lack sufficient focus on specialized nursing fields. Adejumo & Ehlers (2001) compared models of psychiatric nursing education in Botswana and Nigeria, revealing gaps in specialized mental health nursing education [1]. This lack of specialization can leave graduates ill-prepared to address specific healthcare needs, particularly in areas like mental health, geriatric care, or advanced practice nursing.

## 9. Limited research capacity and integration:

The limited research capacity and its integration into nursing education represent another significant weakness. Ajanaku & Mutula (2021) explored knowledge management enablers affecting patient care from the perspective of registered nurses in South West Nigeria [4]. Their study highlighted the need for better integration of research skills and evidence-based practice in nursing education and clinical settings.

## 10. Challenges in quality assurance:

Ensuring consistent quality across nursing education programs remains a challenge. Mgbekem & Samson-Akpan (2007) emphasized the absolute necessity of quality assurance in nursing education [38]. However, implementing effective quality assurance measures across diverse educational institutions and clinical settings presents significant challenges, particularly in resource-constrained environments.



## 11. Limited use of technology in education:

While there are efforts to incorporate technology in nursing education, its use remains limited in many settings. Essel & Owusu-Boateng (2011) discussed the use of technologies for scaling up open and distance learning programs in Ghana [20], but such initiatives are not widespread. The limited adoption of educational technologies can hinder the modernization of nursing education and limit students' exposure to digital health tools.

## 12. Workforce retention issues:

The difficulty in retaining qualified nursing staff, both in clinical and educational settings, poses a significant challenge. Oyetunde & Ayeni (2014) explored factors influencing recruitment and retention of nurses in Lagos State, Nigeria [46]. High turnover rates can disrupt the continuity of education and mentorship, affecting the overall quality of nursing education.

## 13. Limited opportunities for continuing education:

While continuing nursing education (CNE) is recognized as important, opportunities for ongoing professional development are often limited. Nsemio et al. (2013) examined clinical nurses' perception of continuing professional education as a tool for quality service delivery in public hospitals in Calabar, Nigeria [41]. The study revealed challenges in accessing and participating in CNE programs, which can hinder the ongoing skill development of nursing professionals.

These weaknesses presented significant challenges to the implementation of nationwide nursing education reforms in Nigeria and other African countries. The inadequate clinical training facilities, shortage of qualified educators, and limited resources create fundamental obstacles to providing high-quality nursing education. Challenges in implementing the nursing process, examination malpractice issues, and the disconnect between theory and practice further compromise the effectiveness of nursing education programs. The limited adoption of competency-based education and specialized nursing fields, along with inadequate research integration and quality assurance measures, hinder the advancement of the nursing profession. Additionally, workforce retention issues and limited continuing education opportunities affect the long-term development of nursing expertise. Addressing these weaknesses will require concerted efforts from educational institutions, healthcare organizations, and policymakers to create more robust, effective, and responsive nursing education systems.

## Opportunities

### 1. Potential for task shifting and task sharing to address workforce shortages:

The concept of task shifting and task sharing presents a significant opportunity to address workforce shortages in the healthcare sector, particularly in nursing. Okoroafor & Christmals (2023) conducted a scoping review on the rationale and scope of task shifting and task sharing implementation in Africa [26]. Their findings highlight the potential of these strategies to expand healthcare access and improve health outcomes, especially in resource-limited settings.



Lawal Bello et al. (2019) evaluated the knowledge of task shifting and task sharing among nurses in a specialist hospital in Kano, Nigeria [27]. Their study revealed that while many nurses were aware of these concepts, there was room for improvement in understanding and implementation. This gap presents an opportunity for nursing education programs to incorporate task shifting and task sharing principles into their curricula, preparing future nurses to work more effectively in team-based care models.

By integrating task shifting and task sharing into nursing education, programs can equip graduates with the skills to take on expanded roles, potentially alleviating some of the pressures caused by workforce shortages. This approach could also lead to more efficient use of healthcare resources and improved patient outcomes.

## 2. Growing interest in advanced practice nursing roles:

The increasing recognition and development of advanced practice nursing roles offer significant opportunities for the evolution of nursing education and practice. Davis (2017) discusses the essentials for role development in advanced practice nursing, emphasizing the need for specialized education and training to prepare nurses for these expanded roles [30]. This growing interest provides an opportunity to develop more advanced and specialized nursing education programs.

Chimezie & Ibe (2019) specifically explore advanced practice nursing in Nigeria, highlighting its potential to address healthcare challenges and improve patient outcomes [42]. The development of advanced practice nursing roles can drive improvements in nursing education by necessitating more advanced curricula, research-focused programs, and specialized clinical training opportunities.

This trend also presents an opportunity to enhance the status and autonomy of the nursing profession, potentially attracting more individuals to the field and improving retention rates. By developing robust educational pathways for advanced practice roles, nursing education institutions can contribute to the overall improvement of healthcare delivery and address some of the workforce challenges faced by the healthcare system.

## 3. Increasing focus on continuing nursing education:

The growing emphasis on continuing nursing education (CNE) presents a valuable opportunity to enhance the skills and knowledge of practicing nurses throughout their careers. Maziah et al. (2012) discuss best practice initiatives in nursing practice environments, highlighting the role of CNE in maintaining and improving nursing competencies [32]. This focus on ongoing learning can help bridge gaps between initial education and evolving healthcare practices.

Bit-Lian et al. (2022) examine factors affecting participation in CNE among registered nurses in Malaysia, providing insights that can be applied to improve CNE programs in other countries, including Nigeria [33]. By understanding these factors, educational institutions and healthcare organizations can develop more effective and accessible CNE programs.

The increasing focus on CNE also presents an opportunity to leverage technology for distance learning and online education, potentially reaching a wider audience of practicing nurses. This could help address some



of the geographical and resource constraints that often limit access to continuing education.

#### 4. Potential for international collaborations and knowledge exchange:

Globalization in healthcare education offers significant opportunities for international collaborations and knowledge exchange. Dorri et al. (2020) explored nursing education in the path of globalization, highlighting both the promotional aspects and challenges [7]. Such collaborations can bring new perspectives, innovative teaching methods, and resources to nursing education programs in Nigeria and other African countries.

Ti-Enkawol Nachinab & Armstrong (2024) developed a framework for clinical education programs of undergraduate nursing students in Ghana [9], which could potentially be adapted or serve as inspiration for similar initiatives in other African countries. International collaborations can facilitate the sharing of best practices, joint research projects, and student and faculty exchange programs, enriching the overall quality of nursing education.

These collaborations also present opportunities for addressing some of the resource constraints faced by many nursing education programs in Africa. Partnerships with well-resourced institutions could provide access to digital libraries, online learning platforms, and other educational resources that might otherwise be unavailable.

#### 5. Integration of technology and blended learning approaches:

The increasing availability and affordability of technology present significant opportunities for enhancing nursing education through blended learning approaches. Essel & Owusu-Boateng (2011) explored the use of technologies for scaling up open and distance learning programs in Ghana [20], demonstrating the potential of these approaches to expand access to nursing education.

Gyamfi & Gyaase (2015) studied students' perceptions of blended learning environments in Ghana [28], finding that such approaches can enhance the learning experience and provide greater flexibility for students. The integration of technology and blended learning can help address some of the resource constraints faced by nursing education programs, particularly in terms of access to up-to-date information and learning materials.

These approaches also offer opportunities to simulate clinical scenarios and practice decision-making skills in a safe environment, potentially helping to bridge the gap between theory and practice. Furthermore, blended learning can make education more accessible to working nurses or those in remote areas, supporting efforts to increase the nursing workforce and promote continuing education.

#### 6. Growing recognition of the importance of evidence-based practice:

The increasing emphasis on evidence-based practice in healthcare presents an opportunity to strengthen the research components of nursing education. Ajanaku & Mutula (2021) discussed knowledge management enablers affecting patient care from the perspective of registered nurses in South West Nigeria [4], highlighting the importance of research skills in nursing practice.



This trend provides an opportunity to integrate more robust research methodologies and critical appraisal skills into nursing curricula. By emphasizing evidence-based practice, nursing education programs can prepare graduates to provide high-quality, up-to-date care and contribute to the ongoing improvement of healthcare practices.

#### 7. Potential for curriculum reform and standardization:

The recognized need for nursing education reform presents an opportunity to develop more standardized and competency-based curricula. The WHO's (2014) four-year integrated nursing and midwifery competency-based curriculum [23] provides a valuable framework that could be adapted to local contexts.

Masooth Mohamed (2020) discusses curriculum development in nursing [29], emphasizing the importance of aligning educational outcomes with healthcare needs. This focus on curriculum reform presents an opportunity to ensure that nursing education programs are producing graduates with the skills and knowledge required to meet current and future healthcare challenges.

#### 8. Increasing focus on quality assurance:

The growing emphasis on quality assurance in nursing education, as highlighted by Mgbekem & Samson-Akpan (2007) [38], presents an opportunity to improve the overall standards of nursing education. By developing and implementing robust quality assurance mechanisms, nursing education programs can enhance their credibility, improve learning outcomes, and better prepare graduates for professional practice.

#### 9. Potential for specialization in nursing education:

The evolving healthcare landscape presents opportunities for increased specialization in nursing education. Adejumo & Ehlers (2001) compared models of psychiatric nursing education in Botswana and Nigeria [1], highlighting the need for specialized training in mental health nursing. Similar opportunities exist in other areas such as geriatric care, oncology, and critical care. Developing specialized tracks within nursing education programs can help address specific healthcare needs and provide nurses with more career advancement opportunities.

#### 10. Opportunities for interprofessional education:

The growing recognition of the importance of team-based care in healthcare settings presents opportunities for interprofessional education in nursing programs. By collaborating with other healthcare professional education programs, nursing education can better prepare students for the realities of modern healthcare delivery, improving communication skills and understanding of different professional roles.

In summary, these opportunities present significant potential for advancing nursing education in Ghana and other African countries. The growing interest in task shifting, advanced practice roles, and continuing education can drive improvements in curricula and expand the scope of nursing practice. International collaborations and the integration of technology offer ways to enhance the quality and accessibility of nursing education. The focus on evidence-based practice and quality assurance provides avenues for strengthening



the academic rigor of nursing programs. By leveraging these opportunities, nursing education can evolve to meet the changing healthcare needs of populations, address workforce challenges, and elevate the nursing profession. However, realizing these opportunities will require strategic planning, resource allocation, and collaboration among educational institutions, healthcare organizations, and policymakers.

## Threats:

### 1. Brain drain and nurse migration:

One of the most significant threats to nursing education and the healthcare system in Nigeria and other African countries is the persistent issue of brain drain and nurse migration. Oyetunde & Ayeni (2014) explored factors influencing recruitment and retention of nurses in Lagos State, Nigeria [46]. Their study revealed that poor working conditions, inadequate remuneration, and limited career advancement opportunities were key factors driving nurses to seek employment abroad or in other sectors.

Salami et al. (2016) further examined the human resources for health challenges in Nigeria and nurse migration [47]. They highlighted that the exodus of skilled nurses not only depletes the healthcare workforce but also impacts the quality of nursing education by reducing the pool of experienced professionals who could serve as educators and mentors. This brain drain creates a cyclical problem where the loss of experienced nurses leads to a deterioration in the quality of healthcare and education, which in turn encourages more nurses to seek opportunities elsewhere.

The threat of nurse migration is particularly concerning for nursing education as it can lead to:

- A shortage of qualified nursing educators
- Reduced mentorship opportunities for nursing students
- A loss of institutional knowledge and expertise
- Increased workload for remaining staff, potentially compromising the quality of education

Addressing this threat requires a multi-faceted approach that includes improving working conditions, offering competitive salaries, creating clear career progression pathways, and enhancing the overall status of the nursing profession in the country.

### 2. Rapidly changing healthcare landscape requiring constant curriculum updates:

The fast-paced evolution of healthcare practices, technologies, and knowledge presents a significant challenge to nursing education programs. Masooth Mohamed (2020) discusses the complexities of curriculum development in nursing [29], highlighting the need for curricula to be responsive to changing healthcare needs and technological advancements.

This rapidly changing landscape threatens the relevance and effectiveness of nursing education in several ways:

- Outdated curricula may not prepare students for current healthcare realities



- New medical technologies and treatments may outpace the ability of education programs to incorporate them into teaching
- Emerging health challenges (e.g., new infectious diseases, changing population health needs) may require new skillsets not currently emphasized in nursing education

To mitigate this threat, nursing education programs need to:

- Develop more flexible and adaptable curricula
- Implement regular curriculum review and update processes
- Foster closer collaborations between education institutions and healthcare providers to ensure alignment with current practices
- Emphasize lifelong learning and adaptability as core competencies for nursing students

### 3. Limited funding for nursing education and research:

Inadequate funding for nursing education and research poses a significant threat to the quality and advancement of the field. Bvumbwe & Mtshali (2018) in their integrative review of nursing education challenges in Sub-Saharan Africa [13], highlighted chronic underfunding as a major obstacle to improving nursing education.

The threats posed by limited funding include:

- Inability to upgrade facilities and equipment to meet modern healthcare standards
- Difficulties in attracting and retaining qualified faculty
- Limited opportunities for research and scholarly activities
- Constraints on implementing innovative teaching methodologies and technologies

This funding shortage can lead to a widening gap between the quality of nursing education in resource-constrained settings and global standards, potentially exacerbating issues of brain drain and compromising the quality of healthcare delivery.

### 4. Resistance to change from traditional teaching methods:

The reluctance to move away from traditional, often didactic teaching methods represents a significant threat to the advancement of nursing education. Ayandiran et al. (2013) examined the responsiveness of the nursing profession to education reforms in Nigeria [10], noting that resistance to change was a significant barrier to implementing new educational approaches.

This resistance can manifest in several ways:

- Reluctance to adopt competency-based education models
- Limited integration of technology in teaching and learning
- Continued emphasis on rote learning over critical thinking and problem-solving skills
- Slow adoption of evidence-based teaching practices



The threat of this resistance is that it can lead to a widening gap between the skills and knowledge of nursing graduates and the realities of modern healthcare practice. It can also make nursing education less engaging and relevant for students, potentially affecting recruitment and retention in nursing programs.

## 5. Challenges in quality assurance and standardization across institutions:

Ensuring consistent quality and standardization across nursing education institutions poses a significant challenge. Mgbekem & Samson-Akpan (2007) emphasized the absolute necessity of quality assurance in nursing education [38], but implementing effective quality assurance measures remains difficult, particularly in resource-constrained environments.

The threats associated with inadequate quality assurance include:

- Inconsistent educational outcomes across different institutions
- Difficulties in ensuring that all graduates meet minimum competency standards
- Challenges in maintaining accreditation and recognition of nursing qualifications
- Potential erosion of public trust in the nursing profession

These issues can lead to a fragmented nursing workforce with varying levels of competence, potentially compromising patient care and the overall reputation of the nursing profession.

## 6. Technological divide and limited access to digital resources:

While technology presents opportunities for enhancing nursing education, the digital divide threatens to exacerbate existing inequalities. Essel & Owusu-Boateng (2011) discussed the use of technologies for scaling up open and distance learning programs in Ghana [20], but also noted challenges in access and infrastructure.

The threats posed by this technological divide include:

- Unequal access to online learning resources and digital libraries
- Limited exposure to simulations and virtual learning environments
- Difficulties in implementing blended learning approaches
- Graduates being unprepared for increasingly digitalized healthcare environments

This divide can lead to significant disparities in the quality of nursing education between well-resourced and under-resourced institutions, potentially widening the gap in healthcare quality across different regions.

## 7. Increasing competition for clinical placement opportunities:

The growing number of nursing students coupled with limited clinical facilities creates intense competition for clinical placement opportunities. Anarado et al. (2016) identified factors hindering clinical training of students in selected nursing educational institutions in Southeastern Nigeria [17], highlighting overcrowding in clinical settings as a significant issue.

This threat can manifest in:





- Reduced hands-on clinical experience for nursing students
- Compromised quality of clinical teaching due to high student-to-patient ratios
- Potential safety concerns in clinical settings due to overcrowding
- Strained relationships between educational institutions and healthcare facilities

The lack of adequate clinical exposure can significantly impact the competence and confidence of nursing graduates, potentially affecting patient care quality.

## 8. Demographic shifts and changing healthcare needs:

Changing population demographics and evolving healthcare needs present both opportunities and threats to nursing education. The aging population in many countries, including Nigeria, requires a shift in focus towards geriatric care, chronic disease management, and long-term care. However, many nursing curricula may not be adapting quickly enough to these changing needs.

This threat can result in:

- Misalignment between nursing education and actual healthcare needs
- Graduates lacking specialized skills needed for emerging healthcare challenges
- Potential gaps in healthcare delivery for certain populations

## 9. Political instability and policy inconsistencies:

Political instability and frequent changes in educational policies can pose significant threats to the continuity and effectiveness of nursing education reforms. Inconsistent policies can lead to:

- Difficulty in long-term planning for nursing education institutions
- Challenges in implementing and sustaining educational reforms
- Uncertainty regarding funding and support for nursing education programs

## 10. Ethical challenges in healthcare:

Emerging ethical issues in healthcare, such as those related to genetic technologies, end-of-life care, and resource allocation, present challenges for nursing education. Ensuring that nursing curricula adequately prepare students to navigate these complex ethical landscapes is crucial but challenging.

## 11. Global health crises and pandemics:

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the vulnerabilities in healthcare systems and the need for rapid adaptation in nursing education. Future global health crises could pose similar threats, potentially disrupting clinical education, straining resources, and requiring quick curriculum adjustments to address emerging healthcare needs.

These threats presented significant challenges to the implementation and success of nationwide nursing education reforms in Nigeria and other African countries. The brain drain phenomenon, rapidly changing



healthcare landscape, funding limitations, and resistance to change all pose substantial risks to the advancement of nursing education. Challenges in quality assurance, the technological divide, and competition for clinical placements further complicate efforts to improve nursing education. Additionally, demographic shifts, political instability, emerging ethical challenges, and the potential for global health crises add layers of complexity to the educational landscape.

Addressing these threats will require a coordinated and sustained effort from educational institutions, healthcare organizations, policymakers, and international partners. Strategies to mitigate these threats should focus on improving working conditions for nurses, developing more flexible and responsive curricula, increasing funding for nursing education and research, embracing technological innovations, and strengthening quality assurance mechanisms. By proactively addressing these threats, nursing education can evolve to meet the changing healthcare needs of populations, produce competent and adaptable nursing professionals, and contribute to overall improvements in healthcare delivery.

## **Lessons Learned from Nigeria's Experience for Implementing Nationwide Nursing Education Reform in Ghana:**

### **1. Gradual Implementation and Stakeholder Engagement:**

One of the key lessons from Nigeria's experience is the importance of a phased approach to implementation and comprehensive stakeholder engagement. Ayandiran et al. (2013) highlighted the challenges faced in Nigeria due to resistance to change and the need for a more responsive approach to education reforms [10]. For Ghana, this suggests the importance of:

- a) Developing a clear, time-bound roadmap for the transition to a Bachelor's degree as the minimum entry requirement.
- b) Engaging all relevant stakeholders, including current nurses, nursing educators, healthcare administrators, and policymakers, in the planning and implementation process.
- c) Conducting extensive awareness campaigns to educate the public and healthcare community about the benefits and implications of the reforms.

### **2. Addressing Resource Constraints:**

Bvumbwe & Mtshali (2018) identified resource constraints as a major challenge in nursing education in Sub-Saharan Africa [13]. Nigeria's experience highlights the critical need for Ghana to:

- a) Conduct a comprehensive assessment of current resources (human, financial, and infrastructural) in nursing education institutions.
- b) Develop a strategic plan for resource allocation and development, including partnerships with international institutions and seeking external funding opportunities.
- c) Prioritize investment in upgrading existing facilities and establishing new ones to accommodate the



increased educational requirements.

### 3. Enhancing Clinical Training Opportunities:

Anarado et al. (2016) emphasized the challenges in clinical training due to inadequate facilities and overcrowding [17]. To address this, Ghana should consider:

- a) Strengthening partnerships between educational institutions and healthcare facilities to expand clinical placement opportunities.
- b) Investing in simulation laboratories and virtual learning environments to supplement hands-on clinical experience.
- c) Developing innovative models for clinical education, such as community-based learning experiences.

### 4. Faculty Development and Retention:

The shortage of qualified nursing educators, as highlighted by Ezeonwu (2013) [25], is a critical issue that Ghana must address. Strategies should include:

- a) Developing comprehensive faculty development programs to upgrade the qualifications of existing educators.
- b) Creating attractive career pathways and incentives for nurses to pursue academic careers.
- c) Establishing mentorship programs to support new faculty members.

### 5. Curriculum Development and Standardization:

Drawing from the WHO's (2014) competency-based curriculum framework [23] and insights from Masooth Mohamed (2020) [29], Ghana should focus on:

- a) Developing a standardized, competency-based curriculum that aligns with both global standards and local healthcare needs.
- b) Ensuring the curriculum emphasizes critical thinking, evidence-based practice, and problem-solving skills.
- c) Incorporating emerging healthcare trends and technologies into the curriculum.

### 6. Leveraging Technology in Education:

Essel & Owusu-Boateng (2011) [20] and Gyamfi & Gyaase (2015) [28] highlighted the potential of technology in enhancing nursing education. Ghana should:

- a) Invest in e-learning platforms and digital resources to support blended learning approaches.
- b) Provide training for educators in the use of educational technologies.



c) Ensure equitable access to technology and internet connectivity for students across different regions.

## 7. Addressing the Threat of Brain Drain:

Salami et al. (2016) emphasized the challenges posed by nurse migration [47]. To mitigate this threat, Ghana should:

- a) Develop retention strategies, including improved working conditions and competitive remuneration packages.
- b) Create clear career progression pathways for nurses with advanced degrees.
- c) Establish programs to encourage return migration of nurses who have gained international experience.

## 8. Strengthening Quality Assurance Mechanisms:

Mgbekem & Samson-Akpan (2007) stressed the importance of quality assurance in nursing education [38]. Ghana should:

- a) Establish robust accreditation processes for nursing education programs.
- b) Implement regular program reviews and audits to ensure consistent quality across institutions.
- c) Develop national standards for nursing education that align with international benchmarks.

## 9. Promoting Research and Evidence-Based Practice:

Ajanaku & Mutula (2021) highlighted the importance of knowledge management and research skills in nursing practice [4]. Ghana's reform efforts should include:

- a) Integrating research methodology and evidence-based practice courses into the curriculum.
- b) Encouraging faculty and student engagement in research activities.
- c) Establishing partnerships with research institutions to promote nursing research.

## 10. Addressing Specialized Healthcare Needs:

Drawing from Adejumo & Ehlers' (2001) comparison of psychiatric nursing education models [1], Ghana should:

- a) Develop specialized tracks within the Bachelor's program to address specific healthcare needs (e.g., mental health, geriatric care).
- b) Ensure the curriculum is responsive to emerging health challenges and changing demographics.

## 11. Continuous Professional Development:



Nsemio et al. (2013) emphasized the importance of continuing professional education [41]. Ghana's reforms should include:

- a) Establishing a robust system for continuing nursing education.
- b) Linking continuing education to license renewal and career advancement.
- c) Leveraging technology to make continuing education more accessible.

## 12. Interprofessional Education:

To prepare nurses for team-based care, Ghana should:

- a) Incorporate interprofessional education experiences into the curriculum.
- b) Develop collaborative programs with other healthcare professional education programs.

## 13. Addressing Ethical and Cultural Competence:

Ensure the curriculum includes strong components on:

- a) Ethical decision-making in healthcare.
- b) Cultural competence and sensitivity to diverse patient populations.

## 14. Financial Support for Students:

To ensure equitable access to higher education, Ghana should:

- a) Develop scholarship programs and financial aid options for nursing students.
- b) Explore work-study programs and partnerships with healthcare facilities for student support.

## 15. Monitoring and Evaluation:

Implement robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to:

- a) Track the progress and impact of the education reforms.
- b) Identify areas for continuous improvement.
- c) Provide evidence for policy adjustments as needed.

## 16. International Collaborations:

Building on insights from Dorri et al. (2020) [7], Ghana should:

- a) Establish partnerships with international nursing education institutions for knowledge exchange.



- b) Participate in global nursing education networks and forums.
- c) Facilitate student and faculty exchange programs.

## 17. Addressing the Theory-Practice Gap:

To address concerns highlighted by Missen et al. (2016) [34] about new graduate'' clinical competence, Ghana should:

- a) Increase the integration of clinical practice throughout the curriculum.
- b) Develop strong preceptorship programs for new graduates.
- c) Establish clear competency assessments for graduating students.

## 18. Preparedness for Global Health Crises:

In light of recent global health challenges, ensure the curriculum includes:

- a) Disaster preparedness and emergency response training.
- b) Flexibility to rapidly incorporate emerging health issues.

In summary, implementing a nationwide nursing education reform to establish a Bachelor's degree as the minimum entry requirement for nursing practice in Ghana is a complex but potentially transformative endeavor. By learning from Nigeria's experience and considering the unique context of Ghana, policymakers and educators can develop a comprehensive, strategic approach to this reform.

Key to success will be addressing resource constraints, ensuring quality and standardization across institutions, leveraging technology, and focusing on producing graduates who are not only academically qualified but also clinically competent and prepared for the realities of modern healthcare practice. The reform process should be gradual, inclusive, and adaptable, with a strong emphasis on continuous evaluation and improvement.

By carefully considering these lessons and implementing a well-planned reform, Ghana has the opportunity to significantly enhance the quality of nursing education, improve patient care outcomes, and position its nursing workforce as leaders in healthcare delivery both nationally and internationally.

## **Conclusion and Recommendations:**

### **Conclusion:**

The analysis of Nigeria's experience in implementing nationwide nursing education reforms, viewed through the lens of a SWOT framework, provides valuable insights for Ghana's potential transition to a Bachelor's degree as the minimum entry requirement for nursing practice. The SWOT analysis revealed that while there are significant strengths and opportunities to leverage, such as growing recognition of the need for reform



and potential for technological integration in education, there are also considerable challenges to overcome, including resource constraints and the threat of brain drain.

The lessons learned from Nigeria's experience highlight the complexity of implementing such far-reaching reforms and the need for a carefully planned, gradual approach. It is evident that successful implementation requires addressing multiple facets simultaneously, including curriculum development, faculty capacity building, infrastructure improvement, and stakeholder engagement.

The potential benefits of elevating the minimum educational requirement for nursing practice are substantial, including improved patient care outcomes, enhanced professional status for nurses, and better alignment with global healthcare trends. However, these benefits can only be realized if the implementation process is strategic, inclusive, and responsive to the unique context of Ghana's healthcare and education systems.

## **Recommendations:**

Based on the lessons learned from Nigeria and the SWOT analysis, the following recommendations are proposed for Ghana:

1. Develop a phased implementation plan: Establish a clear, time-bound roadmap for the transition to a Bachelor's degree as the minimum entry requirement, allowing for gradual adjustment and continuous evaluation.
2. Invest in infrastructure and resources: Prioritize the upgrading of existing facilities and establishment of new ones to accommodate increased educational requirements. This should include investment in simulation laboratories and e-learning platforms.
3. Enhance faculty development: Implement comprehensive programs to upgrade the qualifications of existing educators and attract new talent to academic nursing.
4. Standardize curriculum: Develop a nationally standardized, competency-based curriculum that aligns with both global standards and local healthcare needs, emphasizing critical thinking and evidence-based practice.
5. Strengthen clinical training: Foster stronger partnerships between educational institutions and healthcare facilities to expand and improve clinical placement opportunities.
6. Address brain drain: Develop retention strategies including improved working conditions, competitive remuneration, and clear career progression pathways for nurses with advanced degrees.
7. Implement robust quality assurance: Establish stringent accreditation processes and regular program reviews to ensure consistent quality across institutions.
8. Promote research: Integrate research methodology and evidence-based practice courses into the curriculum and encourage faculty and student engagement in research activities.
9. Ensure financial accessibility: Develop scholarship programs and financial aid options to ensure equitable



access to higher nursing education.

10. Foster international collaborations: Establish partnerships with international nursing education institutions for knowledge exchange and capacity building.

By carefully considering these recommendations and maintaining a flexible, adaptive approach to implementation, Ghana can work towards a successful transition to a Bachelor's degree as the minimum entry requirement for nursing practice, potentially leading to significant improvements in the quality of nursing education and healthcare delivery.

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