



## Revisiting Nursing Research in Nigeria

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### ABSTRACT

**Background:** Evidence from a nursing conference convened in Nigeria in 1973 amongst other things implied that Nigerian nurses are not adequately educated and ill-equipped with prerequisite research skills. Four decades after the first and only initiative that examined the capacity and contribution of Nigerian Nurses to health care research, it is therefore pertinent to revisit the state of nursing research in the country. **Aim:** To review the academic and research preparedness of Nigerian nurses in conducting research and utilizing research results in healthcare practices. **Methods:** Literature review of seven published articles on nursing education and research in Nigeria, identified through online data bases; Google Scholar, CINAHL and PubMed. **Findings:** The findings revealed that majority of nurses in Nigeria had only diploma degree in nursing education. Also, nurses' involvement and utilization of research was limited and poor even though nursing research was perceived as very important in nursing practice by majority of the nurses. **Conclusion:** Most nurses are not academically equipped with research skills in Nigeria due to minimal educational qualifications not sufficient for conducting nursing research. There is a compelling need to reassess nursing education and research policies in Nigeria.

**Key words:** Nurses, nursing education, nursing practices, nursing research, research utilization, research skill

### INTRODUCTION

In the last few decades, nursing research has experienced a consistent growth globally<sup>[1]</sup> and findings from such research has improved nursing practice and advanced knowledge in health care. Despite these gains and contributions of nursing research, the quantity and quality of such research is uneven between

developed and developing countries.<sup>[2,3]</sup> In the context of Nigeria, the status of nursing research is somewhat unresolved. The prevailing doubts the extent to which Nigerian nurses have progressed in conducting and utilizing nursing research for the advancement of their profession in particular and improvement in health care in general. In view of the dearth of accurate statistics and relevant literature on the subject,



there is at present little knowledge of the true state of nursing research in Nigeria. It is on this premise that a review of the current state of nursing research in Nigeria is needed. Therefore, this article aimed to review the academic and research preparedness of Nigerian nurses in conducting research and utilizing research results in healthcare practices.

A nursing conference convened in Ibadan Nigeria in 1973 amongst other things highlighted that Nigerian nurses were not adequately educated and well equipped with research skills.<sup>[4]</sup> Similarly, a 1990 survey on nursing research in Nigeria showed that little or no progress has been made to improve the research skills of nurses in Nigeria.<sup>[4]</sup> Therefore, questions that readily come to mind are; first, how educationally prepared and qualified are Nigerian nurses in conducting research? Second, how is nursing research perceived by Nigerian nurses, their level of involvement in conducting and utilizing research? Third, what are the barriers to conducting nursing research in Nigeria?

## METHODOLOGY

A literature search was performed on the nurses' educational preparedness which was assessed under three main categories – nursing educational qualification, the conduct of research and the utilization of research results in Nigeria. The review articles were identified through online electronic searches of Google Scholar; CINAHL and Pub Med. Keywords such as nurse, Nigeria, nursing research, nursing practices and nursing education were employed for the search. The inclusion criteria identified and agreed on by two researchers were; titles and abstracts related to nursing education and nursing research in Nigeria with emphasis on educational qualification, knowledge and utilization of research which were published between 1990 and 2014. The search was limited to studies from 1990 as a result of dearth of literature from Nigeria on the study question before this period. Non-English language articles were excluded. The search generated 150 related articles. After abstracts screening and exclusion of duplicated articles, seven relevant literatures were selected. Furthermore, the references of the seven articles were examined in an effort to find additional articles related to

the subject under review, but it yielded no additional result.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Overview of Nursing Research

Nursing research is a systematic approach used to examine phenomena important to nursing and nurses.<sup>[5]</sup> Furthermore, it develops and reforms necessary hands-on knowledge for clinical practice and provides evidence-base information to support nursing practices in the area of disease prevention and elimination of symptoms caused by illness.<sup>[6]</sup> In view of the role of nurses as patient's advocate and guardian of patients' safety and protection, nursing research is essential in finding innovative practice and policy health care framework.

Nursing research is as old as the nursing profession. It began when Florence Nightingale accumulated and analyzed complex information about conditions of soldiers during the Crimean War of 1854-56.<sup>[7]</sup> However, nursing research emerged as a systematic, scientific and clinical inquiry involving the assessment of health care system, nursing practices and nursing education about 50 years ago.<sup>[8]</sup> In countries like United States of America, United Kingdom, the Nordic countries and Brazil, nursing education and research are making good progress with more nurses attaining higher education degrees and getting involved in research. For example, a 2012 survey in the United States of America reported an increase in nursing research-focused doctoral programs in 2013 from 125 to 131 with an increase in enrollment of 4.1% from the previous year.<sup>[9]</sup> Likewise in Finland, currently, there are approximately a total of 300 doctorate degree holders in nursing science involved in research.<sup>[10]</sup>

In Africa, only a few countries like South Africa, Malawi, and Kenya have adequate infrastructure such as well-equipped lecture rooms, e-learning platforms, updated libraries with electronic resource portals and advanced information technology for the education and training of doctoral-prepared nurses, while countries like Ghana and Nigeria are emerging slowly in this area.<sup>[11]</sup> In addition, in 2010, there were 160 nurses registered for their doctoral degree at the 17 university nursing schools in South Africa

with 41 doctoral graduates and approximately 80 nursing research articles published in accredited journals each year.<sup>[12]</sup> We could not retrieve any data on the number of published nursing research in Nigeria. Probably they could not be retrieved through the known international databases.

### Evolution of Nursing in Nigeria

Nursing as a distinct profession and training emerged in Nigeria through the Christian missionaries in 1846.<sup>[13]</sup> The duty stations of these missionaries served as hospitals or clinics and later became the foundation of the various training schools for nurses and midwives. The informal nursing training conducted in these schools at inception was hospital-based supervised by unqualified medical or nursing personnel. The training of nurses in Nigeria continued to run on an ad-hoc and unstructured curriculum till 1957 when the first sets of formal Preliminary Training Schools (PTS) for nurses were established at the regional tier of government in Ibadan for Western Region, Aba for Eastern Region and Zaria for Northern Region. These foundation training schools trained the first certified set of nurses over a period of 6 to 12 months.

In 1962, the Nigerian nursing education gained another milestone. The Lagos University Teaching Hospital commenced the first internationally recognized nursing program and awarded the State Registered Nurse (SRN) certificate.<sup>[13]</sup> Following the success in Lagos, the first university based department of nursing was established in 1964 in the Faculty of Medicine of the University of Ibadan and it awarded a diploma in nursing.<sup>[14]</sup> A major breakthrough was made in nursing education in Nigeria when in 1965 a Bachelor of Science (B.Sc.) nursing program was established in the University of Ibadan. The university graduated the first batch of nursing graduates in 1968. Subsequently, the nursing degree program took off in two other universities, the University of Ife, now known as Obafemi Awolowo University and University of Nigeria in 1972 and 1983 respectively. Presently, there are 76 nursing schools conducting a 3-year program leading to the award of Diploma of Nursing, 27 specialized nursing schools offering post basic nursing education programs, 21 out of 129 universities in the country offering a 4-year bachelor's degree program in nursing, 9 universities offering

master's degree in nursing and 5 universities offering doctorate program in nursing (table 1).<sup>[15,16]</sup>

Furthermore, there are private and public universities in Nigeria and the provision of university education in Nigeria is very expensive. Majority of universities offering nursing programs are the public universities funded by the government. Funding is very poor and budget for the education sector is always insufficient. Even with an increment in the 2014 educational budget to 10.6% (₦493 billion) of the ₦4.6 trillion national budgets as compared to 8.3% of the previous year against the international benchmarks for developing countries of 26%,<sup>[17]</sup> the amount is still not enough for provision of educational services to the populace. With the high price of university as compared to other levels of education in Nigeria, the cost outpacing most family income makes the university education out of reach for most Nigerians. Also, the university cost for science disciplines such as nursing are more expensive than other disciplines in the art.<sup>[18]</sup> In terms of research activities for the universities, underfunding contributes largely to not being able to sustain research activities.<sup>[19]</sup> In trying to address the burden of proper funding of the educational sector, the federal government through the Minister of education had call on society to participate in the provision of university education with the government.<sup>[20]</sup>

Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa with an estimated population of over 180 million people.<sup>[21]</sup> This enormous populations is serviced by approximately 136,000 nurses registered with the Nursing and Midwifery Council of Nigeria,<sup>[22]</sup> on a nurse to patient ratio of 1:6 per 1,000 people.<sup>[23]</sup> Under its three-tier federal structure, health care and education services in Nigeria are jointly administered by the federal government, 36 state governments and 775 local governments.<sup>[24]</sup> Even though, with approximately 39,000 registered medical doctors,<sup>[25]</sup> nurses play a vital role in the delivery of health care services in Nigeria. As such, their proper education and capacity is paramount to the wellbeing of Nigerians. To regulate practice standards together with nursing and midwifery education in Nigeria, the Nursing and Midwifery Council of Nigeria (NMCN) was established as a parastatal under the Federal Ministry of Health.<sup>[15]</sup>

Table1. Number of educational institutions offering different levels of nursing education in Nigeria

	Nursing education	Number of institutions
1	Diploma of Nursing	76
2	Post basic nursing education	27
3	Bachelor's degree in nursing	21
4	Master's degree in nursing	9
5	Doctorate in nursing	5

The NMCN in conjunction with the National University Commission (NUC) regulates the curriculum and teaching of all nursing education programs. The four-year university based bachelor of Nursing Science degree is regulated by the NUC, while the NMCN regulates the three-year nursing diploma program leading to licensing as a Registered Nurse. The NMCN also regulates the award of Midwifery Certificate following a one year of post-secondary education and other specialization certifications such as Psychiatric, Perioperative and Orthopedic Nursing, just to mention a few.<sup>[15,16]</sup>

#### **Educational Qualification of Nigerian Nurses in Conducting Research**

Nursing education lays the foundation for nursing research and provides the skills and knowledge for advancement of health care in general and nursing profession in particular. Bearing in mind that higher levels of educational attainment is a necessary precondition for research and advancement of evidence based practice of patients care, the minimal proportion of Nigerian nurses with post diploma degrees is perceived as a major setback for encouraging Nigerian nurses to get involved in research. There are an overwhelming 75% of professional nurses in Nigeria having only a diploma qualification.<sup>[26]</sup> This is a clear indication that Nigerian nurses are still lagging behind in the attainment of graduate and post graduate

qualifications. This may be attributed to the content and ineffective implementation of nursing educational policies and programs in Nigeria with a focus on diploma qualifications. For instance, in the last two decades, there has been a progressive increase in the establishment of diploma-awarding schools of nursing by the Teaching Hospitals, Federal Medical Centers, Missionary organizations and State governments to the detriment of university based degree programs in nursing.<sup>[27]</sup> This has brought about an increase in the number of nurses in Nigeria with diploma qualifications and the dearth of graduate and post graduate degree holding nurses.

The inclination of nursing education in Nigeria towards diploma qualification has certainly impacted on nursing research. This is regardless of the fact that in the past decade, various reforms have been proposed in Nigeria by the NMCN in a bid to transform the hospital-based nursing training to university education system. Under this initiative, universities are meant to assimilate schools of nursing with an expectancy achievement rate of 75% by 2010 and 100% by 2015.<sup>[27]</sup> The target was not achieved, thus, illustrating a negative outcome in the proposed educational reform. The expectation of this policy shift was that university based nursing degree programs would expectedly equip nurses with research skills and provide them with

scientifically oriented and evidence based clinical practices. Despite the good intention of the nursing training policy by the NMCN, the reality is that the reform output and outcome have been very little and barely visible. It has been argued that the low progress recorded in the implementation and result of this policy is attributed amongst other things to the rigid conditions given by universities for affiliation or assimilation of the schools of nursing into their system.

Subsequently, another push by the NMCN in the direction of encouraging nursing research is the improvement on the current nursing curricular by including research methodology as a course in basic nursing education.<sup>[28]</sup> Regardless of this commendable initiative, nursing practices and care in Nigeria are still largely based on the procedure book rather than on evidence-based practices emanating from research. The reason for this may be attributed to the fact that some of Nigerian-nurse teachers and lecturers are products of procedure and diagnostic centered nursing educational system that is tailored towards the needs of hospital services.

The concerns of forty years ago after the Ibadan nursing conference are still pertinent.<sup>[4]</sup> It suggests to the fact that Nigerian nurses are yet not sufficiently educated and equipped to conduct research. Although there have been nursing educational reforms policies coupled with the accreditation of more universities that offer degree programs in nursing since 1973, they have not translated into commensurate participation of nurses in research in Nigeria. This could be attributed to failed educational reforms and financial constraints leading to lack of morale for continuous education by already qualified nurses. With about 75% of nurses in Nigeria still in possession of the diploma in nursing qualification,<sup>[26]</sup> the capacity and skills for nursing research is still lacking amongst Nigerian nurses. On the other hand, while about 25% of nurses in Nigeria have B.Sc qualifications, they are still bereft of the essential and prerequisite educational backbone for conducting nursing research.

It is therefore imperative that Nigerian nurses with both the diploma and degree qualifications have to move up the academic ladder to attain post-graduate degrees and continuously update

their knowledge so as to make effective and valuable contribution in nursing research. The natural consequence is that the knowledge on research and methodology obtained during post graduate studies are seldom applied. While this laxity may be attributed to the wrong perception that conducting research is only meant for nurses that are in the educational field and not necessary for those in the clinical settings,<sup>[28]</sup> it is important to note that irrespective of the professional strata of nurses, it is vital for nurses to be able to understand the research process and properly apply research findings to enhance nursing practices and care. The direct interface of nurses with patients and the former's appreciation of the latter's needs predisposes nurses advantageously for research.

#### **Nurses' Perception, Involvement, Utilization and Barriers to Conducting Research**

Nurses in Nigeria perceive conducting research and its usefulness in their practices positively.<sup>[4,29,30,31]</sup> Even though the nurses agree that research is beneficial, important and advances nursing care practices, unfortunately majority of the nurses that have been involved in research in Nigeria are data collectors, coordinators of research being done by medical doctors and other professionals in the health care sector or to fulfill a degree requirement.<sup>[4,32]</sup>

A recent study of conduct and utilization of research among nurses showed that out of 325 nurses, a few (21.2%) had conducted a research and 31.4% had utilized research findings in clinical practice.<sup>[32]</sup>

Furthermore, it is difficult to ascertain the number of nurses involved in academic research in Nigeria due in part to the lack of records of national documentation of nurse researchers and the studies they have conducted.<sup>[4]</sup> However, the positive perception of nurses and their awareness of the meaning and importance of nursing research indicate that although Nigerian nurses are limitedly involved in nursing research, a high percentage of them are desirous of being involved in nursing research if equipped with the right skills.<sup>[30]</sup> Within the limited number of nurses involved in research, the extent to which their research findings are utilized is questionable.

Utilization of nursing research findings is important amongst other things because it

promotes safe and effective nursing care enhances critical thinking and reflective practices. The result of a previous research in Nigeria indicated that 74% of nurses utilize research findings in their practice,<sup>[30]</sup> this finding has been contradicted by other research outcomes that posit that research utilization by nurses in Nigeria is minimal.<sup>[29,31,33]</sup> In spite of the utilization of nursing research results, an issue of outmost concern is whose research findings are the Nigerian nurses utilizing in their evidence based practices? Bearing in mind that Nigerian nurses have limited and barely visible involvement in research, it is relevant to say that the research findings that are currently utilized by the nurses might not be suitable and capable of making positive impact in the advancement of nursing practices in Nigeria. Whereas in an African country like South Africa, where about 80 nursing research articles are published in research journal annually by nurses,<sup>[12]</sup> there is every likelihood that most research being utilized for practice is from their environment.

Regardless of the inclination of nurse education in Nigeria, there are many other decades' long challenges that limit nurses from undertaking research and utilizing research findings. Common challenges are lack of infrastructural facilities, funding and work time, inadequate staffing, poor attitudes towards research, inadequate knowledge of research, lack of research mentors and dearth of research resources.<sup>[4,29,32]</sup> It is remarkable to point out that even though solutions to these challenges have been preferred in several studies, they are still prevalent.<sup>[30,31,34]</sup>

Nursing research in Nigeria is at its lowest and has made barely any progress since the Ibadan nursing conference of 1973. On the basis of the foregoing, there is no refuting the fact that the challenges and bottlenecks of nursing research in Nigeria are persistent. While overcoming them and achieving scientific and research oriented nursing practices in Nigeria is an uphill task, it is therefore trite to find that until the challenges hindering nursing research are dealt with, there will still continue to be poor involvement of Nigeria nurses in research.

#### **Implication for Nursing**

This article broadens knowledge and information on nursing research and practices in Nigeria. Nursing research is on the rise as a global trend

in advancing nursing practices, the reverse is the case in Nigeria. To close this gap and align health care system in Nigeria to the benefits of nursing research, the following practices and policy changes are recommended;

- The encouragement of foreign-based Nigerian nurse researchers and academics to return to Nigerian universities to strengthen existing nursing departments and where applicable bring their expertise to the establishment of new nursing departments.
- Universities to help nurses "bridge" from diploma to degree and then to higher degree programs
- Creation and strengthening, as the case may be, post graduate programs in nursing (Masters and Doctoral degrees) in Nigerian universities.
- Review of the current nursing curriculum on research methodology so as to establish a strong research foundation for nursing students.
- Advocate and promote continuous education on research skills acquisition and development for licensed nurses.
- Ensure adequate funding and encourage private-public sector partnership in the operations of nursing departments in Nigerian universities.
- Creation of and effective funding of a National Nursing Research Centre by the NMCN and Federal Ministry of Health to serve as a central structure and national documentation center for nursing research in Nigeria.
- Provision of enabling research infrastructure and resources in Nigeria.
- Creation of nursing research awareness, capacity and attitude toward research through symposiums and seminars.
- Conducting nursing surveys on research in the six geopolitical zones of the country

## **CONCLUSION**

This review showed that nursing research in Nigeria is still limited as nurses are not academically prepared to conduct research. The majority of nurses had only the nursing diploma qualification with poor involvement in research and the utilization of research results. Higher educational qualification is crucial in research and many of the nurses in Nigeria have not attained the required educational level to conduct research, and utilize research results in their care practices, even though they have

positive perception towards nursing research. Health problems and other societal challenges in Nigeria are evolving by the day. As such, nurses as the backbone of health care in Nigeria have to step up their care practices by improving their research skills and capabilities while imbibing new scientific methods to meet with the growing health care needs in the country. Regardless of the global contributions of nursing research to the advancement of knowledge and having regards to various educational reforms efforts to advance nursing education and research; nursing research in Nigeria is still weak. To domesticate the global positive gains of nursing research, there is a compelling need to reassess nursing education, encourage nurses in conducting research and utilizing research results, as well as developing nursing research policies in Nigeria.

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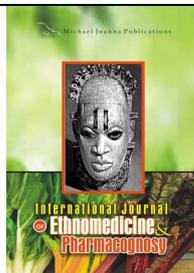
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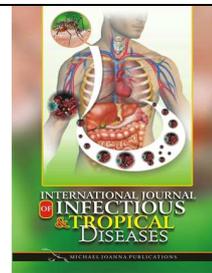
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