**NURSING EDUCATION IN CONTEMPORARY NIGERIA'S EDUCATION SYSTEM : ISSUES AND CHALLENGES**

A Paper Presented by

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Protocols

I am delighted to be invited by the National Association of Nigeria Nurses and Midwives (NANNM), to present the lead paper at this 6th Quadrennial National Delegates Conference.

The issue in focus is not new to the Nursing and Midwifery Council of Nigeria, NANNM and the Nurses of Nigeria. It could be recalled that Nursing education reforms was one of the issues that featured prominently during the last National Delegate Conference of NANNM held in Yenegoa, Bayelsa State. What I feel may be new and of interest to the participants at this conference is the current steps taken by the Council to ensure that nursing education and practice reforms rolled out by the Council and Nursing Leaders, about a decade ago are implemented logically as was envisaged.Therefore, I will try within the few minutes allotted for this presentation to focus on the educational system in Nigeria and the place of nursing education within this system as well as the challenges that the Council has faced while trying to implement the reforms over the years. I will conclude by presenting the highlights of the current strategies the Council is embarking on in order to achieve its goals of reforming nursing education and practice in line with the contemporary educational system in Nigeria.

The educational system in Nigeria could be holistically appreciated by having a good grasp of the National Policy on Education of Nigeria. According to the former Minister of Education, Chief (Barr) NyesomWike, the National Policy on Education is the national guideline for the effective administration, management and implementation of education at all tiers of Government. It is a statement of intentions, expectations,goals, prescriptions, standards and requirements for quality education in Nigeria (National Policy on Education 2013, p.ii).

Section 1, subsection 3 of the National Policy on Education (2013) states that Nigeria’s philosophy of education is based on the following beliefs:

1. Education is an instrument for national development and social change
2. Education is vital for the promotion of a progressive and united Nigeria
3. Education maximizes the creative potentials and skills of the individual for self-fulfillment and general development of the society
4. Education is compulsory and a right of every Nigerian irrespective of gender, social status, religion, colour, ethnic background and any peculiar individual challenges; and
5. **Education is to be qualitative, comprehensive, functional and relevant to the needs of the society.**

Section 4 of this policy further states that education in Nigeria is based on the development of the individual into sound and effective citizen and the provision of equal opportunities for all citizens of the nation at the **basic, secondary and tertiary levels.**

The Nursing and Midwifery Council of Nigeria firmly believes that, for its Nursing Education Reforms to be relevant, sustainable and acceptable it should be in line with the underpinning philosophy and basic principles outlined in the National Policy on Education as enumerated above.

Professional education reforms is better considered in the context of the general educational system of any nation (Anyandiran et al 2013). This is obvious because no system exists in isolation. Therefore, one of the fundamental goals of nursing education reforms should be to develop a flexible and dynamic system that fits into the existing education structure of Nigeria.

The fundamental issue that the Council has endeavored to address in relation to Nursing Education Reforms is, what modalities should be adopted in the reforms of the Hospital Based Schools of Nursing and Post Basic Nursing programmes? The best way of resolving this singular challenge is to reflect on the provisions of the National Policy on Education.

According to the National Policy on Education (2013, p.iv), the Nigerian educational system is categorized into:

* Early Child Care and Development - Ages 0-4 years
* Basic education- Ages 5-15 years. This comprises of 1 year of Pre-Primary education, 6 years of Primary education and 3 years of Junior Secondary Education
* Post – Basic Education of 3 years in Senior Secondary Schools and Technical Colleges, and
* Tertiary Education provided in Colleges of Education, Monotechnics, Polytechnics and Universities.

The policy further states that the Federal Ministry of Education, the 36 State Ministries of Education and the FCT Education Secretariat as well as the 774 Local Government Education Authorities have direct responsibilities of running the administration of education in Nigeria.

The regulation and quality maintenance of the education system in Nigeria is the statutory mandate of three regulatory agencies which are :

* National Universities Commission (NUC),
* National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) and
* National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE).

It should be of concern to the delegates of this Conference that in the revised National Policy on Education of Nigeria, section 5 is dedicated to Tertiary Education. Paragraph 80 of the document states as follows:

*Tertiary Education is the education given after Post Basic education in institutions such as Universities and Inter-Universities Centres such as the Nigeria French Language Village, Nigeria Arabic Language Village, National Institute of Nigerian Languages, institutions such as Innovation Enterprise Institutions(IEIs), and Colleges of Education, Monotechnics, Polytechnics, and other specialized institutions such AS Colleges of Agriculture, Schools of Health Technology and the National Teachers’ Institutes(NTI)* (National Policy on Education 2013, p. 26)

There is no mention of Schools of Nursing and Midwifery or Post Basic Nursing programmes in any portion of the Revised National Policy on Education. In section 5, subsection D which focuses on Innovative Enterprise Institutions, paragraph 112 enumerate among others, institutions such as:

* Information Technology (IT) Institute
* School of Oil and Gas Technology
* Fashion Institute of Technology
* School of Hospitality and Tourism
* Film Academy, and so on and so forth.

Surprisingly, there is no place in this section of the policy where Nursing and Midwifery Education or Schools are mentioned or made reference to.

The structure of Nursing Education was of the fashion of Britain with Hospital Based Schools that produce Nurses and Midwives that were registered by the General Nursing Council of England and Wales, the Nurses and Midwives Council of Northern Ireland, General Nursing Council for Scotland or equivalent in the United Kingdom, prior to when these functions were fully taken over by the Midwives Board and Nursing Council in Nigeria(Ndatsu 1999). Since the hospitals in which the nursing institutions were affiliated were and are still managed by the Ministries of Health, the Schools of Nursing and Midwifery automatically came under the same administration and management instead of being under the Ministry of Education as stipulated by the National Policy on Education. This is an anomaly in education administration in Nigeria. The same also applies to the Basic and Post Basic Schools which are under the Teaching Hospitals. According to Anyandiran et al (2013) in the national education framework of Nigeria, the hospital based nursing education system has suffered some setbacks by being administered by the Ministries of Health instead of the Ministry of Education. Instead of benefiting from the statutory provisions and structural progression as other post-secondary education programmes, the academic progression of Nurses is unnecessarily long and tortuous. The placement of Registered Nurses some with additional post basic qualifications, who want to acquire university based nursing education appears as if the prior learning has not been acknowledged. In addition, in the National Educational Framework, a degree is the recognized academic certificate awarded to university graduates, National and Higher National Diploma are recognized academic certificates awarded at the Polytechnic level just as the National Certificate of Education (NCE) is for the Colleges of Education. The case of Hospital Based Schools of Nursing appears to be antitypical with the Schools awarding no academic certificates because they are not empowered by the relevant education regulatory agencies in Nigeria to that effect.The Revised National Policy on Education only serves to confirm the fact that the Hospital Based Nursing Education in Nigeria appears to be unrecognized or forgotten by the education managers, administrators and policy makers. This is a call for reflection and an urgent need for restructuring in order to allow nursing education to be in alignment with the education system and structure of the Country.

Nursing education in Britain had been restructured and reorganized several times over through series of reforms. According to Merrifield (2015) the Nursing and Midwifery Council of England is about embarking on another nursing education reform aimed at allowing undergraduates spend more time in general nursing training before specializing in order to improve their basic nursing skills. So, there is no educational system that does not need reforms from time to time.

In Nigeria, there is need to answer these questions and to address them through appropriate Nursing education reforms:

* Why are the Schools of Nursing still being administered by Ministries of Health against the provisions of the National Policy on Education?
* Who is or are gaining from allowing the Schools of Nursing and Midwifery to be under the management of Ministries of Health and Teaching Hospitals? Is it the nursing profession, the students, the professional nurses educated from these institutions or the society?
* Why are some Nurses still against the Monotechnic option of Nursing education reforms when the National Policy has ample provision for it.
* If School of Hospitality and Tourism, Fashion Institute of Technology, School of Oil and Gas Technology and Schools of Health Technology are recognized while Schools of Nursing and Midwifery are not even mentioned, in our National Policy in Education, why are some Nurses and even health care managers resisting Nursing education reforms?
* How are the Nurses educated from these Schools rated by other health care professionals, the labour market and the society?
* What should be done to improve or change the above situations.

 The above highlights are issues of serious concern to the Nursing and Midwifery Councilof Nigeria and should be of concern to NANNM and Nurses in general.

The reassuring aspect is that these issues could be resolved with appropriate nursing education reforms.

The question many would want answered is, why has the nursing education not been restructured over these years since the rolling out of the Nursing education and practice reforms by the Council? The following have been the challenges we have faced and the ways we hope to resolve them:

* **Lack of agreement and harmony among the Nurses on the nature of Nursing Education Reforms.**

The Council has expressly identified the line of reforms for Nursing education as: the University and the Polytechnic (Monotechnic) options. These options are in accordance with the provisions of the National Policy on Education of Nigeria. However, the Council has over the years met with counter arguments and oppositions from Nurses all over Nigeria as to why the Monotechnic option should not be adopted. Those from this School of thought are only in favour of the University option. However, it should be appreciated that notwithstanding its benefits, the University option is not feasible for all the Schools of Nursing and Midwifery in Nigeria. Even in developed societies, there are different levels of professional Nurses with each knowing its limits.

* Another challenge the Council has faced over the years, is that some Nurses and Nursing organizations have resorted to negative criticisms only without offering recommendations or proffering solutions. Such attitudes and actions could only be counterproductive. To these Nurses, the Council encourages them to engage in constructive criticism as this would assist in building a better Nursing profession that we all desire.
* There has been the perennial reluctance of some Proprietors of Schools of Nursing to let go of the institutions to the Universities for absorption, NBTE and even to the Ministry of Education for administration purposes.
* The quantification and award of academic certificates by the Hospital Based Schools has been a challenge that is not yet fully resolved.

**The Way Forward**

The Council has a good working relationship with the National Universities Commission and the National Board for Technical Education as well as other stakeholders in the country’s educational system and would continue to leverage on this existing collaboration to ensure that the Nursing education reform is achieved.

The Council is working on the following modalities and strategies:

* The University Option.

The Council is already working with the National Universities Commission and the National Open University of Nigeria, Nurses in the academia and in the Diaspora to promote the creation of more Departments of Nursing and opening up multiple channels for Nurses who are aspiring for university based nursing education.

* Absorption or Assimilation into the University

This is the option that Council is exploring with all the seriousness it deserves.

Nursing Schools that are able to open a relation with the Universities are free to work out the modalities for absorption or assimilation with these institutions. This arrangement would enable the Nursing Students to be absorbed from the Schools of Nursing or Midwifery to be integrated into the University and to receive academic certificates by the parent University at the end of the programme. This could be facilitated by having a Faculty of Nursing that has Departments of Nursing, Midwifery, Public Health/Community Nursing and for Clinical Specialties in Nursing. This latter option could also absorb the current Post Basic Programmes in Nursing.

Schools of Nursing in the Teaching Hospitals and others could also explore the establishment of Institute of Nursing Studies which is domicile and managed by the University as platform for absorption of the Schools of Nursing and Midwifery. This will promote smooth transition and upward academic mobility for the Students who aspire for further studies in Nursing.

* The Polytechnic or NBTE Option

The Council has almost concluded arrangements with the National Board for Technical Education for the take off of the ND/HND program in Nursing.The Council is ever ready to support Schools that can be absorbed by the Universities, but for others the Monotechnic option still remains a viable option.

This will resolve the issue of academic certificate, uniform entry and management of the Schools by the approved agencies of the Federal Government of Nigeria.

* The Current Hospital Based School of Nursing and Midwifery Model

The present Schools of Nursing and Midwifery will be allowed to exist, and to restructure over time to join the mainstream education system, depending on their capacity and resources. This modality will ensure that the production of nursing and midwifery manpower is not jeopardized while the reform is being implemented. This is also in line with the principles and philosophy of the National Policy on Education. More so, the Nursing profession all over the world benefit from having different cadres of Nurses who are competent in their own right to handle various duties as stipulated in the curricula of training. These levels of nursing manpower are also needed by the employers of labour and the society in Nigeria. At the end of the day the students, parents or sponsors and the society will determine which Nursing Educational System to choose from.

**Conclusion**

The transformation of nursing education and the profession as a whole would be achieved if we as stakeholders work together with the Council towards the successful implementation of the Nursing education and practice reforms. NANNM is an inseparable partner of the Council as far as issues of Nursing education and practice are concern. The Council appreciates the support given to it by NANNM and would continue to work together with the Association to ensure that the aspirations of Nurses for the Nursing profession and the health care delivery system as a whole in Nigeria is achieved. With your support and hard work, we will be able to develop a nursing education system that promote scholarship, excellent community service, professionalism, entrepreneurship, national growth and development. This goal is achievable with the support of all stakeholders in Nursing especially Nurses themselves.

Thank you for your attention.

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