

Original Article

Continuing Formal Education for Non-Professional Nurses in Ghana: Exploring the Motivational Factors

Edith Buamah Agyepong (MPhil, BSc. Nursing, RGN) ¹

Adelaide Maria Ansah Ofei (PhD) ²

Adzo Kwashie (PhD Candidate, MPhil) ³

Abstract

Non - professional nurses are trained to assist professional nurses to perform their duties. In – service training programmes are designed to augment the knowledge of these nursing assistants in the profession, but they yearn to pursue continuing formal education to upgrade their professional and academic qualification. The purpose of this study was to find out factors that motivate non - professional nurses to continue their education. The qualitative exploratory descriptive design was employed to explore the experiences of non–professional nurses with continuing formal education. Twenty three (23) participants were purposively selected for the study, and a semi-structured interview guide with open - ended questions was used in gathering data from December 2016 to January 2017. The findings from the study indicated that non–professional nurses are motivated to continue their education because they had low academic qualifications, lacked professional competencies, were self-determined to progress in life, their employers recognized a higher academic qualification than several years of working experience and they were practicing outside their job descriptions. The study concludes that staff development plans should be designed by employers and educational institutions responsible for the training of non–professional nurses should have flexible programmes to enhance access.

Keywords:

Continuing Formal Education; Continuing Education; Nurses; Motivational Factors, Non - Professional Nurses; Continuing Professional Development.

1. *Nurses' Training College, Pantang*
2. *School of Nursing and Midwifery, University of Ghana*
3. *School of Nursing and Midwifery, University of Ghana.*

1. **Corresponding Author:**
*Nurses' Training College, Pantang
P. O. Box 1236, Legon-Accra, Ghana.
Email: biamahagyepoing@yahoo.co.uk*

Introduction

Nurses engage in two types of education. These are in - service training and continuing formal education. In - service training may be in the form of continuing professional development, workshops, and seminars which are designed to assist nurses develop professionally. Also, continuing formal education leads to the acquisition of undergraduate and post – graduate qualifications.

The motivation to continue one's education originates from an inward desire to develop academically (Pool, Poell & Ten Cate 2013). According to Richards and Potgieter (2010), updating professional knowledge to enhance skills is the reason for returning to school. Warren and Mills (2009) found that commitment to the nursing profession is a motivator for nurses pursuing further studies. Acquiring extra knowledge to enhance one's professional status, clinical practice as well as obtaining a scholarship encourages registered nurses to continue their education (Ni et al., 2014; Richards & Potgieter, 2010). Furthermore, educational programmes that have flexible duration are easily accessible and meet the needs of the learners, and this inspires participation in a continuing education programme (Brekelmans, Maassen, Poell, Weststrate & Geurdes, 2016 ; Nalle, Wyatt & Myers, 2010; Perfetto, 2015 ; Power et al., 2011).

Registered nurses who pursue continuing formal education are exposed to opportunities such as attending international and national conferences, assuming leadership positions and acquiring critical thinking and research. (Plunkett, Iwasiw, & Kerr, 2010; Osterman, Asselin, & Cullen, 2009; Warren & Mills, 2009; Witt, 2009). The aforementioned studies highlight the reasons for registered nurses' participation in further studies but there is paucity of literature on factors that motivate non–professional nurses to pursue continuing formal education.

Non–professional nurses are trained to assist the professional nurse on the clinical field. In Ghana, there are two categories of non–professional nurses: 1) Nurse Assistant Clinical (Enrolled Nurse) who work in the community or hospital. 2) Nurse Assistant Preventive (Community Health Nurse) who assist the public health nurse. Non–professional nurses, after practicing on the field for a number of years, realize

they are lacking in knowledge and wish to continue their education to augment their basic knowledge in nursing (Shahhosseini & Hamzehgardeshi 2015). Periodically, in – service training programmes are organized for non- professional nurses, but these nurse assistants aspire to excel academically as their professional counterparts (Badu-Nyarko, 2015). This study therefore explored the factors that motivate non–professional nurses to further their education.

Design and Methods

Research Design

The qualitative exploratory descriptive design was used for the study. This approach allowed the researcher to gain a deeper understanding into the factors that motivate non–professional nurses to engage in continuing formal education (Neergaard, Olesen, Andersen, & Sondergaard, 2009).

Research Setting

The study was conducted in a teaching hospital in the Greater Accra Region of Ghana. This setting was chosen because the hospital is located on the same premises with two nurses' training colleges established to train professional nurses. The proximity of the hospital to the school is likely to heighten non–professional nurses' interest in pursuing further studies.

Target Population

The target population for this study comprised all non–professional nurses working at the hospital. The inclusion criteria were:

- a) Non - professional nurses who have worked for at least five years at the hospital and have not engaged in continuing formal education.
- b) Non-professional nurses who have worked for at least five years at the hospital and are currently pursuing continuing formal education.
- c) Non - professional nurses who have worked for at least five years at the hospital and have completed any form of continuing formal education.

The exclusion criteria was non-professional nurses who were sick at the time of data collection.

Sampling Technique and Sample Size

The purposive sampling technique was used in recruiting 23 non-professional nurses to give a detailed account of the factors that motivate them in pursuing continuing formal education. Saturation was reached with the 23rd participant.

Research Tool

Data were gathered using a semi-structured interview guide with open-ended questions developed by the researchers which allowed probing on the motivational factors for pursuing formal continuing education.

Data Collection

Formal permission was obtained from the administrator and the Deputy Director of Nursing Services (DDNS) of the hospital to select study participants. Non-professional nurses at the hospital were contacted by the researcher and briefed on the purpose and procedure of the study. Information sheets regarding the study were given for further illumination on the research topic. Non-professional nurses who met the inclusion criteria and consented to participate in the study were recruited. During the interviewing sections, consent was obtained from participants to record the interview. The first author conducted all the interviews in this study.

Data Analysis

Content analysis was used in analyzing the data. The recorded interviews were transcribed and read several times to fully understand the views of participants. Content analysis techniques were followed where codes were inductively generated from the data to form themes and sub-themes. The identified themes and sub-themes were compared with their collated data extracts and these were used in the report to provide voice to the participants.

Rigour of the Research

The researchers acquainted themselves with the target population and reviewed appropriate documents on non-professional nurses and continuing formal education. The research methodology and the data gathering process were described into details. The research setting and the inclusion and exclusion criteria for selecting participants were also described. Also the transcribed data were verified to ensure that

findings represented the information participants shared.

Ethical Consideration

Ethical approval was obtained from the Institutional Review Board at Noguchi Memorial Institute for Medical Research, University of Ghana. The Institutional review board number for conducting this research is IRB 00001276. Non-professional nurses were contacted and the nature, purpose, procedure and the importance of the research explained to aid their understanding of the research. The selection of participants was voluntary and no coercion was applied. Non-professional nurses who consented to be part of the study were recruited and given the chance to withdraw from the study without any consequences. Participants were assured of confidentiality and were identified by identification codes.

Results

Demographic Characteristics of Participants

The study involved 23 non-professional nurses comprising 22 females and a male. Eight participants had not engaged in continuing formal education whilst six had completed continuing formal education. With the six, two had graduated with Diploma in Community Psychiatry, two with Certificate in Post Basic Midwifery, one with Bachelor of Science in Nursing and one with Diploma in Health Promotion. Nine participants were in School. Out of the nine, eight were pursuing Certificate in Post Basic Midwifery and one in Bachelor of Science in Nursing. The age of participants ranged from 29 and 37 years. Fourteen participants were married and nine of them were single. The participants who were married had at most two children whose ages ranged between eight months and five years.

The data revealed that, the motivation for non-professional nurses to continue their formal education originated from their interaction with colleagues at the workplace and the public. In analysing the data, the main theme "motivations to continuing formal education" had eight sub - themes emerging from the data.

Self - determination

Participants who had completed school and those in

school were determined to continue their education. They felt they were young, full of capabilities and had the right to education.

"I was personally motivated to go back to school. After completing the basic certificate programme, I was in my early twenties so I told myself that I had to go back to school within the next three years, I improved on my senior high school grades and pursued a diploma programme in health promotion" P1

Participants who had completed school and those enrolled on a programme maintained that, at school, the academic environment was full of pressure, but they were determined to complete their programmes of study successfully.

"Before I went to school, I was told the programme was difficult. I got to school and realised it for myself, the first year was not easy; but with determination, I told myself I would complete this programme" P2

A number of participants in school reiterated that their determination to complete their programmes was backed by trust in God.

"The programme is not easy, I am going through pressure because I have no care taker assisting with the family chores and this makes learning difficult, but I trust God will see me through this programme successfully" P6

Low Academic Qualification

All the participants were motivated to further their education because their low academic qualifications in the nursing profession hindered their opportunity of being employed by private health care facilities.

"Do you know that some private institutions in this country do not employ us because of our low academic qualification? Sometimes you go for interview at these hospitals and you are turned down. So obviously you will be motivated to go back to school" P20

Participants who are engaged in continuing formal education lamented that their low academic qualifi-

cation required that they worked under supervision even though they considered themselves competent.

"On the field, you may have the skill to carry out a particular assignment, but because your qualification is basic, you still have to be supervised and I hated this when I knew I have much skill than the one supervising me. So I made the decision to go back to school" P14

Progression in Life

Participants were motivated to engage in continuing formal education because they wanted to progress in life. Non-professional nurses wanted to take advantage of all the opportunities life had to offer rather than being static in life.

"I am not comfortable with my level in the profession, I can't just be at one place and be working, I need to move on in life. I believe there are several opportunities out there waiting to be explored" P23

"Living in the village as a community health nurse delays your plans... so I needed to read-just my thinking to progress in life" P4

Employers' recognition for higher academic qualification than experience

Generally, all the participants were motivated to further their education because they realised the health sector recognises advanced qualification for practice than years of working experience.

"After working for six years on the ward, someone will come with a higher qualification with no experience, you will be teaching the person what to do, but that person will become your boss, so why don't you upgrade yourself to take that position?" P16

A number of participants who had not returned to school felt that irrespective of their years of working experience, suggestions they made on the ward were ignored and this sometimes led to fatal consequences.

"During one clinical section, I saw a four-year-old girl with burns on the left thigh who was in

pain. I suggested how this could be managed effectively to the ward in charge but because I was a nurse assistant I was brushed over... with time the girl's burns got infected and she died. This story really hurts me. If the in - charge had listened to me, that child would not have died so I am motivated to learn hard to complete my programme so that I can help save more lives"
P5

Lack of professional competencies

Majority of participants were motivated to further their education because they believed continuing formal education would enable them build on their professional competencies. Some non-professional nurses acknowledged that even though they were proficient with the practical aspect of nursing, they had some deficiencies in their nursing skills which they needed to build on.

"As a community health nurse, I was supposed to do everything. Aside weighing babies, giving immunisation and health education which I did without supervision; I had challenges conducting deliveries and this could affect the lives of my patient, so I decided to further my education"
P14

Ambition and Drive for Better Career Options

All the participants declared they were motivated to return to school because they had personal ambitions to attain in life. Others also recounted that their low educational backgrounds would not lead them to better career options, they would always remain auxiliaries, hence the need to further their education to access other career opportunities.

"For me, I want to aspire higher. This wasn't my aim, it wasn't where I wanted to start from. I want to pursue midwifery, specifically bachelor's degree in midwifery and that has been my dream" P22

A number of participants who worked as community health nurses wanted different career options because their work was difficult and stressful. Some participants worked for long hours alone without any assistance.

"I worked at the CHPS center alone with an orderly; in the mornings, I do consultations and around 12pm when the place is less busy, I close the centre and go for home visits looking for child welfare clinic defaulters, family planning defaulters as well as tracing the aged with wound. I return to the facility and there will be clients waiting to be attended to. I rarely had time to eat. So I decided to go back to school to become a Psychiatric Nurse which I believe is more flexible" P7

Participants acknowledged that, challenging physical situations such as working in rural areas with limited social amenities motivated them to pursue further studies.

"At the village where I worked before pursuing further studies, there were no lights, place of convenience and washroom; In fact it was a real ghetto so I advised myself to continue my education so that I could get a better career" P1

The unfair treatment meted out to participants at their workplaces motivated the majority of them to return to school.

"I assumed duty with a professional nurse, after three years we were all expecting our promotions, she was promoted and I was told to wait for five years. In fact, I felt cheated, so I decided to further my education to become a professional nurse" P2

Practicing outside one's Job Description

Non-professional nurses were trained to assist professional nurses, but they found themselves carrying out the duties of professional nurses and midwives. Practising outside one's job description was a major factor for pursuing continuing formal education. Participants realized it was illegal and could have landed them in trouble.

"Majority of non-professional nurses are not midwives, but we have been performing the role of midwives without having any license, so it is important you go to school and pursue midwifery so that you can also practice well" P10

Although some participants knew the consequences of practising outside their job description, they always considered the plight of their patients and performed such tasks which further motivated them to pursue higher education.

"I know I am to assist a senior colleague on duty, but sometimes you are only two non-professional nurses on a shift and there is no senior nurse or a doctor. If a patient has to be fed you have no option than to pass a nasogastric tube for the patient but this is not my duty" P3

Lack of Respect

Participants experienced lack of respect. This is a major factor which motivated them to continue their education. Professional nurses and other health care professionals disrespected the non-professional nurses. Other participants also felt humiliated by the general public.

"I wanted a change of job title from a community health nurse to a midwife and this comes with respect because when you are in the brown uniform, people believe you are not a good nurse. I felt my identity was at stake" P15

A number of participants felt they had to go back to school because their efforts were not appreciated by their senior colleagues.

"I worked in remote villages which sometimes I would have to walk for one hour forty minutes while carrying the items I will need to work with. You are at times beaten by rain but our superiors humiliated us if we did not meet our target for the month. Out of this hard work, if you are not appreciated it really hurts" P8

Participants who worked within the communities also narrated that the general public did not regard them in spite of the services they provided. Although the public did not know the academic qualifications of non-professional nurses, they identified them by the colour of their uniforms.

"I was once assisting a doctor to do consultation in his office when a woman came in requesting the services of a private nurse. The doctor

knowing my competence recommended me to the woman, but she said no! I am not a good nurse, so from that point on, the doctor asked me not to be wearing my uniform to the consulting room but rather an ordinary dress. All these instances are humiliating; it makes you feel bad and you are motivated to go back to school" P14

Influence of Mentors and Role Models

Role models play an influential role in participants' decision to return to school for further studies. Participants acknowledged that role models made richer contributions to decision making and were highly admired by their works.

"When you attend programmes, you realized that individuals who have pursued continuing formal education made richer contributions and their knowledge is far richer than yours so I also wanted to pursue continuing formal education so that I will stay on top of issues like my colleagues" P17

Participants who had completed school admitted they had become role models and are encouraging colleagues to further their education.

"My ability to pursue Bachelor of Science in Nursing has motivated some of my colleagues to go back to school. Some are pursuing degree nursing. Now everyone talks to me, I have become a role model and a mentor; people are asking me how I did it" P4

Discussion

Participating in continuing formal education requires a diligent effort from the student. Self-determination was identified as a motivator that propels non-professional nurses to pursue further studies. Amid challenging situations such as juggling family and work responsibilities, participants enrolled in continuing formal education. Richards and Potgieter (2010) affirmed that registered nurses who were on a programme of study wanted to abandon the programmes because they could not catch up with class schedules. Alternatively, Perfetto (2015) opined that, commitment and dedication on the part of nurses are motivating factors for nurses to complete their programmes of study. These findings may indicate that,

despite the challenges surrounding non-professional nurses' return to school, a greater number of them are personally motivated to continue their education.

This study further showed that the majority of non-professional nurses return to school because they are young and have the potential to do more for themselves and the nursing profession. This finding corroborates that of Alamri and Sharts-Hopko (2015) who found that younger nurses between the ages of 26 to 29 years and had worked for 6 years were greatly motivated to continue their education. Similarly, non-professional nurses in this study pursued continuing formal education because they wanted to excel within the profession and not remain perpetual nursing assistants. This finding implies that nurses should be encouraged to continue their education at an early age so as to contribute to the development of the nursing profession.

Registered nurses return to school to build on their previous knowledge (Richards & Potgieter, 2010). This study revealed that non-professional nurses are motivated to further their studies due to their low academic qualification which, some participants disclosed, made them embarrassed and stumbled their chances of being employed by private healthcare facilities. Other participants maintained that their low academic qualification necessitated that they were supervised to carry out some procedures on the ward even though they could perform it better. Hutchinson, Mitchell & St John (2011) opined that enrolled nurses who were on a Bachelor of Science in nursing programme felt ashamed when they were prevented from participating in advanced nursing procedures on the ward. This finding may suggest that non-professional nurses concede their basic knowledge about the profession as an obstacle to delivering quality care to their clients, hence, their determination to further their education (Ni et al., 2014).

The study further found that non-professional nurses are motivated to return to school because they want to progress in life. Participants affirmed they were displeased with their ranking in the profession as nursing assistants as it impeded their development in life. Non-professional nurses who worked in rural areas felt the village life was not conducive for their personal growth; their chances of getting married were

delayed while others were divorced. This finding supports that of Nsemo, John, Etifit, Mgbekem & Oyira (2013), Pool et al. (2013) and Witt (2011) that confirmed that registered nurses engaged in continuing formal education as a result of their personal interest, prospect of unraveling opportunities that are associated with continuing formal education. This finding may require that, measures are put in place to promote the continuing formal education of non-professional nurses to assist them contribute significantly to the profession.

Lack of employer's recognition for non-professional nurses' long years of service is another reason they would continue their education. Participants maintained that after working for so many years, a neophyte nurse without much experience in the profession becomes their superior because he or she holds a higher qualification. Previous studies confirmed that nurses pursue further studies to acquire academic qualifications to build on their professional status (Ni et al. 2014; Nsemo et al. 2013).

The study found that the aspiration to build on one's professional competence is a motivator for non-professional nurses to go back to school. Participants made it known that, though they had a firm grasp of the practical aspect of nursing, they did not understand the theory behind what they practiced. This finding supports other studies which corroborated that nurses return to school to learn new things and build on their proficiency (Ni et al., 2014; Shahhosseini & Hamzehgardeshi, 2015). This finding emphasises that nurses no longer want to practice with the trial and error means of caring for patients, thus the need for evidence-based practice to be introduced into the nursing curriculum to aid nurses understand the underlying principles supporting their practice.

The fear of being caught up by the law is a major reason why non-professional nurses return to school. The study confirmed that majority of non-professional nurses on the field performed duties outside their job description; they carried out activities such as passing naso-gastric tubes and conducting deliveries which are to be done by professional nurses. Consequently, the majority of participants are eager to continue their education to acquire the right qualification to practice.

The findings of the study indicated that the majority of the participants return to school because they lacked respect from colleagues and the general public. Participants complained they were considered inferior at their work places and were discriminated by the public as unqualified nurses. Pool et al. (2013) confirmed that obtaining a higher academic qualification to enhance one's self-esteem is a motivating factor for nurses to pursue further studies. This finding is pertinent and demands immediate attention. A decreased self-respect has several implications for nursing practice. The nurse assistant may feel humiliated, and this is likely to affect the care she renders to her patients and subsequently affect the productivity of her organisation. This finding highlights the need for counselling services to be provided for nurses at their places of work to discover factors that hinder the development of self-respect among nurses and the appropriate interventions put in place to resolve them.

The achievement of mentors and role models within the health sector is a motivating factor for non-professional nurses to further their education. This finding complements that of Richards and Potgieter (2010) and Skela - Savič and Kiger (2015) who maintained that role models and mentors play a role in nurses' pursuance of further studies. Skela - Savič and Kiger (2015) underscored the importance of pro-

fessional training for role models and clinical nurse mentors to impact knowledge on nurses as well as nursing students.

Implication for Nursing Education

Consumers of healthcare demand competent and quality healthcare. This requires that non-professional nurses are well trained and equipped to face this demand, hence non-professional nurses should be encouraged to pursue further studies as per their institutional policy.

Conclusion

The study concludes that non-professional nurses have genuine reasons for furthering their education. Enhancing their academic progression in the nursing profession requires collaboration between all stakeholders to create opportunities for further education. In addition, management of health care facilities should create an enabling organizational environment that motivates non-professional nurses to pursue further studies.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest

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