

Nursing and Midwifery Education at the University of Zambia: A Four Decade Trajectory and Future Focus

A team of Nurse Educators give us an insight into the training of nurses and midwives at the university of Zambia

Introduction

Nurses in Zambia and worldwide constitute the largest group of health professionals, thereby contributing immensely to the attainment of all global health goals, including Universal Health Coverage.

The University of Zambia, School of Nursing Sciences has been instrumental in the training and development of Nursing and Midwifery professionals in Zambia who form the backbone of the country's health system and contribute to the attainment of the all global health goals.

The School which opened with one certificate and one Diploma training programmes at its inception in 1978, with only two programmes and less than 20 students, now hosts 20 programmes; two at diploma, five at BSc degree, Nine at MSc and four at PhD levels with more than 1,700 nursing and midwifery students studying on different modes.

The school is poised to introduce more programmes as the demands increase in the country. The School is also looking forward to a future where continued enhancement of the training environment and standards are a norm so that UNZA-SoN graduate nurses and midwives meet international standards and are fit to practice across settings from low-resource to high technology environments from the lowest level of qualification with Diploma to the highest qualification and competence at Doctorate and Post Doctorates.

Background Information

Nurses constitute the backbone of health care systems. They form the greatest number of healthcare workers globally^{1,2}, and specifically in Zambia. It is well known that combined with midwives, nurses make up over 50 percent of health professionals. Their contribution towards the health of the population has been recognised in that they play a critical role in bridging gaps in health care access, attainment of global health goals, including Universal Health Coverage, quality care and health security which depend greatly on their availability, quality, and equitable distribution.^{3,4}

Despite the universal roles they play, education of nurses and midwives vary globally, with different levels of qualifications ranging from basic certificates in hands-on training to diplomas, bachelors degrees, masters degree and doctoral levels, depending on country specific needs and level of development. According to Morin, 2014, nurses in the North America have had at least three options through which they can become nurses². The first one involves hospital based education which results in the award of a diploma while the second is a community college route. The graduates of the community college route earn an associate degree. The third one is a 4-year college, and university option which earns the graduate a baccalaureate degree. Similarly in Zambia, there are different options for training nurses and midwives. From the early 1960s, the training was at college certificate and diploma level, a model which the University of Zambia had initially adopted. However, in the 2000s, it became imperative to commence a gradual phasing out of certificate level training and introduce graduate training which came to fruition after 2010. While college diploma training of Nurses and Midwives has been the major option in Zambia, full description, development and contribution of this training to nursing and Midwifery education in Zambia is beyond the scope of this paper. The aim of this paper is therefore to provide a developmental trajectory, current challenges and future focus of Nursing and Midwifery Education at the University of Zambia.

Nursing and Midwifery Education developmental milestones at the University of Zambia

Nursing Education at the University of Zambia spans four decades having started in 1978 as a joint effort of the University of Zambia, Ministry of Health (MOH) and World Health Organization (WHO). At the time of inception, the goal was to meet country specific needs by offering a Certificate programme in Public Health Nursing (CPHN) and Diploma in Nursing Education (DNE). The Diploma in Nursing education was specifically meant to develop the critical mass of Nurse tutors who would be deployed to train Nurses and Midwives in the Ministry of Health established Nursing and Midwifery Schools in the country. Similarly, along the way all developments and introduction of new programmes have been fully consultative involving relevant stakeholders and with a view to meet country specific needs besides responding to global trends in Nursing and Midwifery Education.

In 1981, the certificate and diploma programmes

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A group of nursing students_Fulcrum Aid

were phased out, which paved the way for introduction and commencement of the Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BScN) programme, a flagship programme for the University of Zambia because it was the first BScN at the University of Zambia and the entire country. The programme enrolled nurses who had basic Diploma qualification, and was therefore referred to as Post Basic Nursing. The programme provided for two majors in which graduates could choose from; that is medical/surgical nursing or public health nursing and later an option for Maternal Child Health Nursing was introduced. However, most graduates from the programme worked as Nurse Tutors in Colleges offering diploma and certificate nursing and midwifery programmes in Zambia. As the demand for higher education opportunities, and skilled human resources increased, the Generic BScN Degree Programme was introduced in 2010. The programme was in response to the increased need to provide an opportunity for pre-service training of graduate nurses. The success of all these processes is attributed to series of consultative meetings and consensus with relevant stakeholders of Nursing and Midwifery in the country.

Although the Bachelor's Degree in Nursing had graduated 357 graduates between 1983 and 2004, there was no opportunity for graduates of this programme to pursue higher degrees in nursing. As a result, most graduates diverted and pursued Master of Public Health (MPH) degree. It was only after more than two decades in 2004 that a Generic Master of Science in Nursing (MScN) degree programme was launched. The commencement of the generic MScN programme was with the support of the framework of an Institutional collaboration project between UNZA, MOH and other Core High Education Institutions. In 2010, the programme was reviewed to allow candidates to major into four disciplines; Clinical Nursing, Midwifery, Mental Health and Psychiatry and Public Health Nursing. This developed into separation the four disciplines as stand alone specialized disciplines of Master of Science degree programmes in Clinical Nursing, Midwifery and Women's Health, Mental Health and Psychiatric Nursing and Public Health Nursing in 2015.

Following the introduction of MSc degrees in the four disciplines alluded to above, the outstanding gap was the doctoral level. While Scheckel, 2009 asserts that Doctoral Education for Nurses has existed since the 1920, at the University of Zambia, the Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Midwifery and Clinical Nursing programmes were only introduced in 2016. Notably, the development of the PhD in Midwifery programme was funded by the Norwegian Programme for Capacity Development in Higher Education and Research for Development (NORHED) project. Apart from the PhD in Midwifery, NORHED supported the 2015 development of the specific Midwifery and Women's health programme and the first BSc Midwifery programme which was implemented in 2017. In line with other Doctoral programmes in the University of Zambia then, and the model where traditionally PhDs were unstructured⁵, the two PhD programmes were similarly unstructured and administered a research PhDs.

Amidst an upward trajectory or implementation of higher degree programmes in nursing and midwifery there were also lateral or horizontal introduction of other lower but important programmes following key stakeholder consultations, university mandate and human resource requirements at country level. Accordingly, in 2018 the BSc in Oncology Nursing was introduced followed by the BSc in Public Health Nursing and BSc in Mental Health and Psychiatric Nursing in 2021 and 2022 respectively.

Further, with the operationalization of the University of Zambia Kitwe Satellite Campus in 2021, a Diploma in Nursing and Diploma in Midwifery were introduced in 2021 and 2022 respectively. The introduction of the two Diploma programmes was in response to the University Strategic Direction to develop and introduce demand driven programmes which are highly sought after and met the country specific human resource for health.

In 2021, the four existing Master of Science degree programmes (clinical nursing, midwifery and women's health, mental health and psychiatric nursing and public health nursing) were reviewed to strengthen the clinical/practical component of the programmes in order

to produce practitioners who are hands-on and more practical and service delivery oriented. In the same year, five more specialized MSc programmes including; Critical Care, Emergency and Trauma, Oncology, Neonatal and Palliative Care Nursing were developed and subsequently implemented to allow for further sub specialization. In order to enhance hands on practice as was demanded by stakeholders, UNZA-SoN conceived and implemented a model which was referred to as Early and Enhanced Clinical Exposure Model (EECE). EECE is a novel model which entails immediate placement and integration of MSc nursing and midwifery students into the clinical area for continued hands-on learning throughout the training period ⁶.

Given the lack of structure to the doctoral programmes which were introduced in 2016, coupled with the arguments against the traditional unstructured apprenticeship model of PhD training and towards industry-driven, competency-based PhD, and in line with global trends for training doctoral candidates, the school developed four structured doctoral programmes in the four main disciplines of Nursing, Midwifery, Mental Health and Psychiatry and Public Health Nursing⁷. Each of the four PhD programmes has a number of tracks (sub-disciplines) which candidates depending on their interest and prior training can choose to enroll for their doctorates. Tracks for PhD Nursing include Clinical, Critical Care, Emergency and Trauma, Oncology Nursing, Palliative Care Nursing, while those for Midwifery include Midwifery, Sexual And Reproductive Health, Women's Health, Adolescent Health and Neonatal Nursing. On the other hand, Mental Health and Psychiatric Nursing tracks include Adult Mental Health Nursing, Child and adolescent Mental Health, Community Mental Health Nursing and Maternal Mental Health while Public Health Nursing tracks comprises; Health Promotion, Family and Community Health Nursing, Environmental Health, Occupational Health, Global Health Nursing Population Dynamics and Health Care Management. Enrolment in the PhD Programmes is dependent on availability of suitable supervisors.

As at 2022/2023 University of Zambia Academic calendar, the School is offering a total of 20 programmes; two at diploma, five at BSc degree, Nine at MSc and four at PhD levels. Different programmes are offered under various modes, which are a full time, blended and distance depending on the nature and or complexity of each programme. The programmes are offered under four Departments namely Basic and Clinical Nursing, Mental Health and Psychiatry Nursing, Midwifery, Women's, and Child Health, and Public Health Nursing. In 2023/2024 academic year the School will introduce another MSc programme, in Nursing Education, Leadership and Governance practice.

Future Focus

Nursing Education at UNZA -SoN has developed to a level that a broad scope of programmes are offered and producing graduates who capable of providing quality nursing and midwifery care from preconception to end of life or across a continuum from the well to the acutely ill needing emergency care to the chronically

ill and the dying. The vision of UNZA-SoN is to be “a point of reference in nursing and midwifery higher education provision in the East, Central and Southern African Region and beyond”. The School is looking forward to a future where continued enhancement of the training environment and standards are a norm so that UNZA-SoN graduate nurses and midwives meet international standards and are fit to practice across settings from low-resource to high technology environments and from lowest level of qualification with diploma to the highest qualification and competence at Doctorate and Post Doctorates. In the next five years, the school is also positioning itself to introduce more sub specialized programmes at MSc level including but not limited to pediatrics nursing, operating theatre nursing, cardiovascular nursing and more urgently geriatric nursing which has been seen as a gap considering the country's increasing life expectancy and consequently aging population.

Conclusion

Education and training for nurses and midwives at the University of Zambia has progressed steadily over the years. The existing and new programmes have continued transforming nursing and midwifery care provision and enhancing evidence-based practice in all care settings in Zambia and beyond. While certain challenges such as inadequate funding and infrastructure, and lack of specialized teaching staff in some disciplines, the University of Zambia remains committed and has positioned itself to train and graduate competent nurses and midwives who will continue to function in clinical service areas, nursing and midwifery education, leadership and governance, and research in both public and private sector

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