

Internal Quality Assurance: Does It Exist in Ghanaian Nurses Training Colleges?

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Abstract

This study examined the internal quality assurance practices of Ghanaian Nurses Training Colleges. The research design was a descriptive case study in which the researcher in-depth interviewed five teachers who were key informants with regards to the topic that was studied. Their responses were transcribed, analyzed manually and presented in a narrative form. The findings indicated that the current internal quality assurance practices of Ghanaian Nurses Training Colleges concentrated on students' admissions, teaching and learning, examination moderation and students' assessments. Recommendations were made for Ghanaian Nurses Training Colleges to broaden the coverage of their current internal quality assurance practices to include post-assessment moderation, student evaluation of teachers, student evaluation of courses and learning facilities.

Keywords: Internal quality assurance, nurses, practices.

Introduction

Assuring quality of nurse education has become crucial now for the delivery of safe and high quality care to nursing clients (Aziz 2011). This need is also further propelled by market forces which demand competent nurses to respond to complex health care delivery systems, policies, regulations and professionalism (Koch 1992). This might have made the quality of nurse education to engage the attention of governments in both developed and developing nations including Ghana. Nurses Training Colleges are pioneer providers of nurse education in Ghana but currently nurse education is offered in Ghanaian universities too. Internal quality assurance system refers to systems management of the daily practices in a nursing and midwifery institution in order to ensure that the institution runs a nursing and midwifery programme according to the standards defined by the national nursing and midwifery organization (World Health Organization 2010).

Assuring quality in nurse education is not a new thing in Ghana. In 1972, the Government of Ghana established the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC), to serve as regulatory body responsible for all issues concerning nursing and midwifery profession in the country (Government of Ghana 1972). Additionally, Ghana established the National Accreditation Board (NAB) in 1993 to serve as a national quality assurance body at her tertiary education level (Government of Ghana 1991). Furthermore a university that a Ghanaian Nursing Training College is affiliated to is supposed to have a mechanism in place to supervise the activities of that college because the university is responsible for the award of certificates to the graduates of that particular Nurses Training College. These developments might have compelled Oyewole (2012) to state that amongst the African countries, Ghana's external quality assurance system is amongst the best. However, the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (2010) reported that a well-established external quality assurance without a strong internal quality assurance in an institution would not lead to real improvement in quality. This implies that establishment of internal quality assurance processes is not optional to Ghanaian Nurses training colleges but a requirement to enable them to produce competent nurses to respond to the complex health care delivery systems in Ghana.

Statement of the problem

Quality nurse education remains Ghana's hope of improving health care, improving productivity and reducing the high level of poverty amongst its populace. Currently, Ghanaian Nursing Training Colleges are subjected to dual quality supervision by the National Accreditation Board (the National quality assurance body) and the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC). Despite the contributions of these two bodies with regards to ensuring quality in the Nurses Training Colleges, Materu (2007) argued that educational institutions including Ghanaian Nurses training colleges need to establish internal quality assurance processes to supplement the external quality assurance mechanisms if they want to ensure high academic standards, integrity and accountability and subsequently to enhance their global competitiveness. However, little is known about the internal quality assurance practices of Ghanaian Nursing Training colleges. This study sought to uncover the internal quality assurance practices of Ghanaian Nurses Training Colleges.

Research questions

1. What are the current internal quality assurance practices of Ghanaian Nurses Training Colleges?
2. In what ways can these internal quality assurance practices be improved?

Research objectives

1. To report the internal quality assurance practices of Ghanaian Nurses Training Colleges.
2. Recommend to managers of Ghanaian Nurses Training Colleges strategies to employ to improve their internal quality assurance practices.

Significance of the study

The findings of this study will bring to light the internal quality assurance practices of Ghanaian Nurses Training Colleges. The recommendations of this study could also be adopted by managers of nurse education to improve upon their internal assurance practices. Lastly, the findings of this study would serve as data for researchers who would want to conduct research in nurse education in Ghana in future.

Methodology

A qualitative research methodology was adopted because of the nature of inquiry that was undertaken. The research design was a descriptive case study. Case study is an “empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the “case”) in depth and within its real-world context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident”(Yin 2014:16). This was used in order to elicit as much information on the internal quality assurance practices of Ghanaian Nurses Training Colleges. Five (5) key informants were selected from a Nurses Training College in the Brong Ahafo region of Ghana and were in-depth interviewed to collect data for this study. This was through direct verbal interaction between me and the key informants. I sought permission from the key informants and set an appropriate scene for the interviews. I then explained the “rules of the game” (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2011) to the interviewees for them to be aware of what to expect during and after the interviews. I loosely structured my interview questions to allow the “interviews to remain fairly conversational and situational (Patton 2002) while allowing me to explore, probe, and ask questions that illuminated the topic at-hand. I audio taped the interviews to reduce the risk of any misinterpretation and facilitate the exact description of data as it was said (Aziz 2011)however; I avoided using the recording device as a substitute for listening(Yin 2014). In all, the interviews lasted between twenty to thirty minutes.

Going Native

The fact that I conducted this study in my own nurses training college may be seen by others as bogus. This is because I may be perceived to have a personal stake and substantive emotional investment in this setting(Alvesson 2003) which might shape my perspectives and behavior as well as the participants of this study. This notwithstanding the benefits my native status brought outweighed the challenges I encountered. I approached this study with a detailed and rich understanding of the issue I investigated and the people and organizational dynamics contained within it (Smyth & Holian 2008). This enabled me to get access to the research site easily, identify the key informants and conduct the interviews with the key informants without any hassle. I demonstrated sound research practices to strengthen the credibility of this study (Smyth & Holian 2008). This allowed a deeper and more insightful investigation and exploration of the internal quality assurance practices of Ghanaian Nurses Training Colleges.

Data Analysis

I analyzed the data from my interviews in order to assign meaning to it. I converted the audio recordings from each of the interviews into transcripts. I familiarized myself with the data through reading and reflecting on it(Ary et al. 2014). Though I had access to a computer software programme such as NVivo10 that could have assisted me to do the coding, I decided to do the coding manually for me to see the world through the eyes of the key informants. I coded using highlighters, with a master sheet indicating which colors were connected with each category (Ary et al. 2014). I checked all the entries with the same code and then merged these categories into patterns by finding links and connections among these categories(Ary et al. 2014). These merged categories were captured as themes and presented in a narrative form in the next section.

Findings and Discussions

The data that emerged from the interviews portrayed that Ghanaian Nurses Training Colleges had some mechanisms they used to enhance the quality of education they offered to students. These interventions are presented in four themes namely:

- Admission practices
- Teaching and learning practices
- Examination moderation
- Assessment practices

Students Admission Practices

Requirements to gain entry into Nurses Training College in Ghana are normally set by the Ministry of Health and the Nurses and Midwives Council of Ghana. This notwithstanding, all the participants claimed that Ghanaian Nurses Training Colleges had an additional way of further tightening their entry requirements. They indicated that student applicants who applied to the school and met the entry requirements were invited to write entrance examination in the school. Those who were successful in these examinations were later made to attend interviews after which if they were successful they were given admission to pursue the nursing programme. These internal quality assurance strategies were used by the institution to ensure that students who gained admission into the school had the abilities to pursue the academic programme the institution offered.

Teaching and Learning Practices

With regards to ensuring quality teaching in the school, it emerged from the interview of participant (BA4) that teacher applicant's had to first meet the qualification requirements to teach in a Nurses Training College in Ghana. After an applicant had met this requirement, he/she was invited to go through rigorous interview processes. Successful applicants were then appointed to teach in the school. These strategies helped to ensure that teachers who taught in the school had knowledge in pedagogy, content and were experienced to handle the courses they were offered to teach.

On the part of participant BA3, he indicated that as a way to improve teaching in the school, the school organized in service training for the teachers. These were normally in the form of seminars and workshops and were focused on lecture preparation, lecture delivery, assessment and teacher-student relationship. These strategies were used to transmit new knowledge on pedagogy and content of courses to staff. This enabled the institution to enhance the quality of teaching offered to students. .

For participant B2, he admitted that this institution provided enabling environment for teaching and learning. He claimed the school had introduced projectors, microphones and speakers in some classrooms. For instance the microphones and speakers allowed the voices of both teachers and students to be audible in the classrooms. This strategy ensured effective interaction between teachers and students in the classrooms and demonstration rooms.

Examination Moderation

For participant BA1 examination was one of the internal quality assurance mechanisms the institution used to ensure quality teaching and learning in the school. He claimed that the school conducted examinations at the end of every semester. This participant indicated that the teachers set examination questions together with their marking schemes and submitted to the principal's office. These questions were kept under lock and key and made available to students to answer on an examination day at an examination venue. This platform was used by this institution for students to give feedback on what they have studied after going through a course of study.

Assessment practices

The examinations written by the students were marked by the course teachers. Participants (BA5, BA2) claimed that the teachers awarded marks to the answers students had provided in their answer booklets. They indicated that the marks represented the level of achievements of students in the course they had studied. This strategy enabled the institution to monitor the progress of the students as they went through the academic programme offered in the institution.

Conclusion

The study provided insights into the current internal quality assurance practices of a Ghanaian Nurses Training College. This institution engaged in some internal quality assurance practices which enabled her to ensure quality students' admissions, quality teaching and learning, quality examinations and quality assessments. Despite that these internal quality assurance practices were used to improve the quality of teaching and learning, the institution had no internal quality assurance policy.

I therefore recommend that the current internal quality assurance practices be institutionalized. By this I mean that accepted practices in relation to admissions, teaching and learning, examinations and students' assessment should be documented to serve as reference to staff and students as they perform their roles in the institution. I also suggest that, internal quality assurance practices of this institution be extended to cover areas such as post-assessment moderation, student evaluation of teachers, student evaluation of courses and learning facilities. Capacity building for staff on internal quality assurance should also be prioritized. This would help to improve the quality of training offered to students in this institution.

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