

Improving Health Training Institutions Status to Function As Tertiary: Challenges and the Way Forward in Ghana

Abstract

The objective of this opinion article is to explain how to improve Health Training Institutions Status to Function as Tertiary. Health Training Institution (HTI) is a unit under Ministry of Health of Ghana which has as its principal object the conducting of courses of training in the theory and practice of health care delivery, including nursing, midwifery and allied health subjects. These and many other measures like being abreast with accreditation procedures, improving facilities such as library, ICT and skill laboratories, general infrastructure and proper and efficient governance system coupled with good leadership style to reflect on the contemporary tertiary education system.

Key words; Health Training Institutions, Tertiary, Ghana

Introduction

There is no doubt that destiny has placed upon our health training institutions the onerous responsibility to advance the training of highly knowledgeable, skilled and specialist nurses and midwives at the tertiary level. Health training institution (HTI) is a unit under Ministry of Health of Ghana which has as its principal object the conducting of courses of training in the theory and practice of health care delivery, including nursing, midwifery and allied health subjects. Nurses and midwives continue to effectively and efficiently provide quality nursing and midwifery services to the people of Ghana and the world at large. This development has become very crucial due to the sense that the major health problems which affected Ghanaians at independence were primarily communicable, material, perinatal and nutritional diseases. However, Ghana now has a more complex burden of diseases that cut across all ages, gender, locations and socioeconomic status group in the country. Maternal and neonatal health conditions remain a challenge, especially in rural areas and among the poor. Non-communicable diseases such as hypertension, strokes, cancers, diabetes. Eye disorders, and oral health conditions are among the top illnesses in Ghana. (National Health Human Resource Strategy and Plans, 2020)

Table 1: Ghana Top 10 Causes of Death

1. Malaria
2. Lower respiratory infections
3. Neonatal disorders
4. Ischemic heart disease
5. Stroke
6. HIV/AIDS
7. Tuberculosis
8. Diarrheal diseases
9. Road injuries
10. Diabetes

Source: GBD Compare 2018, Ghana

Secondly, Ghana is experiencing an improvement in life expectancy resulting in an aging population that presents different conditions, including musculoskeletal and neurodegenerative disorders. (National Health Human Resource Strategy and Plans, 2020).

Table 2: Ghana - Historical Life Expectancy Data

Year	Life Expectancy	Growth Rate
2022	64.68	0.400%
2021	64.42	0.400%
2020	64.17	0.400%
2019	63.91	0.410%
2018	63.65	0.580%
2017	63.28	0.580%

Source: UN - World Population Prospects 2019

Additionally, we continue to battle the health and socioeconomic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, and there is the need to prepare to face emerging infectious disease such as monkey-pox diseases that has raised its ugly head in some developed countries in Europe and other areas as declared by WHO as epidemic in May, 2022. In Ghana there has been report of some cases.

Last but not the least is the necessity to achieve Universal Health Coverage that emphasize on “all people have access to the health services they need, when and where they need them, without financial hardship”

It should be noted that until some universities, both public and private started training nurses and midwives for award of degree, in the country, the Health Training Institutions under Ministry of Health had and continue to train large majority of nurses and midwives mainly certificate and diploma programmes. This means that the contribution of Health Training Institutions to health delivery system of Ghana cannot be overemphasized. However, the major stakeholders, nurse educators and the general governance of health training institutions, are playing a pivotal role on which the training of these nurses and midwives resolve hence the work of the nurse educators could be described as extraordinary. The Nurse Educators who are the major stakeholders, in the midst of numerous challenges are playing the pivotal role on which the training of these nurses and midwives resolve hence the work of the nurse educators could be described as extraordinary.

By the very nature of our chosen double profession, Nurse Educators are the searchlight of healthcare practice as they train majority of the work force in the health sector, and the key to the excellent health care, they are expected to lead the way to revitalize and strengthen effective and efficient training of nurses and midwives in Ghana for the benefit of our people and beyond.

Ironically, it would interest all to note that some public universities and most private universities that award degree to their graduates continue to rely on Nurse Educators to teach in various institutions while Health Training Institutions continue to train for certificate and diploma programmes. The unfortunate aspect of it is that our diploma certificate cannot even be awarded by Health Training Institutions, but the monitoring universities. Now, the question is, why should some of these universities continue to rely on the Nurse Educators for the award of degrees but our own institutions cannot award even diploma certificate?

Tertiary education as defined by Nina Arnhold (2021) refers “to all formal post-secondary education, including public and private universities, colleges, technical training institutes, and vocational schools”. The World Bank (2017) also described “Tertiary Education, as third-level, third-stage or post-secondary education, is the educational level following the completion of secondary education. This definition of tertiary education includes universities as well as trade schools and colleges”.

The above definition therefore suggests that Health Training Institutions are already tertiary institutions and therefore it would be appropriate to presume no need for further upgrade to the status of tertiary. Nevertheless, these institutions have not live up to expectation due to numerous challenges they face, especially the nurse educators teaching in these institutions. The challenges include;

1. Inadequate qualified and experienced faculty members to teach relevant and specialist subjects in the Health Training Institutions as required by Ghana Tertiary Education Commission and Nursing and Midwifery Council of Ghana.
2. High Attrition rate of qualified and experienced faculty members to other universities, greener pastures and brain drain.
3. Inadequate knowledge and skills in research and publications to contribute to knowledge to enhance teaching and learning so as to promote evidence based practice at the clinical sites for the benefit of patients.
4. Lack of funds and support to promote research and publications in the Health Training Institutions.
5. Lack of understanding on the procedures to secure institutional and programs' accreditation from Ghana Tertiary Education Commission and Nursing and Midwifery Council of Ghana. As a result, most institutional heads and Nurse Educators perceive the policies and recommendations of these regulatory bodies as nuisance.
6. Non adherence to mentoring institutions policies and recommendation by some Health Training Institutions.
7. Poor states of library, skill laboratory and ICT facilities in some Health Training Institutions due to lack of commitment to invest in these vital departments.
8. Inadequate infrastructure such as staff accommodation, classrooms, hostel and other Recreational facilities.
9. Inefficient organizational structure, governance system and leadership style coupled with lack of understanding of the modern tertiary education system by some of our leaders.
10. Political and traditional authority's interference in the running of the Health Training Institutions.
11. Lastly indiscipline, gross insubordination and non-compliance to the college's rules and regulations among some tutors.

These and many other challenges are the counterproductive in the smooth running of the Health Training Institutions as tertiary institutions.

THE WAY FORWARD TO ATTAIN TERTIARY STATUS

Having identified the various challenges as hindrance to achieve tertiary status, the way forward to achieve tertiary status as envisage in the vision of the MOH shall include:

Firstly, **building strong, robust and well- respected faculties** that would result in a competitive and well-regarded tertiary institution. A respected and empowered faculty is the essential ingredient for rendering the institutions a first class model of research, discovery and teaching. A strong, robust and well-respected faculty in HTI **should have the following;**

- a. **Faculty members with their basic qualification as first degree in nursing or midwifery. This would enable other professions** and Ghana Tertiary Education Commission and Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) accept our faculty members. In addition, the degrees that would be offered shall be highly valued by students, the institutions, and employers.

- b. Some faculty members with postgraduate degrees in the relevant subject areas such as anatomy, physiology, pharmacology, Nursing, Midwifery, Psychology and others as these courses are very relevant in the training of nurses and midwives at the tertiary level for the award of first degrees.
- c. Some faculty members with specialist and fellowship training from recognized professional and academic institutions such as Ghana College of Nurses and Midwives, West Africa College of Nurses and midwives just to mention a few. Having faculty members in specialty areas such as medical nursing, surgical nursing, advanced nursing, pediatric nursing, mental health and many others is very favorable. This is because it would pave the way for proper collaboration between the institutions and the Nursing and Midwifery Council, Ghana College of Nurses and Midwives and mentoring institutions to initiate training of specialists in these colleges.
- d. Faculty members who belong to and in good standing with the regulatory body (Nursing and Midwifery Council of Ghana) to maintain high professional standard.
- e. Faculty members who belong and in good standing with recognized professional associations such as GRNMA and Nurse Educator's Group.
- f. Faculty members who are well disciplined and do not engage in professional misconduct such as examination malpractice and insubordination.

It should be noted that successful formation of the faculty would lead to a diverse faculty with appropriate balance of skills, interests and the experience ones mentor their young faculty. As a result, it beholds on the heads of institutions to appoint senior and experienced faculty members to positions so as to mentor the junior and young ones and not the other way around like what is happening in our institutions.

Secondly, there is an urgent need to retain faculty member. Faculty recruitment and training is a major expense for colleges and MOH as they devote a considerable amount of resources to the recruit and train them. However, colleges and MOH have failed to devote the same attention to retaining Faculty Member. We have learned through many studies that it's far less expensive to retain experienced faculty members you have than to recruit new ones. We cannot attain tertiary status as we continue to loss all our productive experience faculty members to other universities. It is therefore imperative that as part of measures to attain tertiary status, the colleges, HTI and MOH develop a culture of retention of faculty members alike.

We should do away with those cultures that push the faculty members away from our institutions such as intimidations, insults and threaten them with transfers without due recognition to the labour law and Public Sector Act. In some unfortunate situations, just a phone call to the MOH could cause a transfer of a tutor.

It is also known that the reasons for brain drain include the 'pull' and 'push' factors. According to Dovlo (2003) 'push' factors are those factors that occur within the country of origin, motivating professionals to leave. 'pull' factors, on the other hand, are the deliberate and / or unintended actions of the recipient country (i.e., policies) that attract health professionals from other countries. The push factors included low remuneration and poor economic conditions, poor working conditions, and low job satisfaction, inability to acquire social amenities, and poor governance or perceived poor governance (Clarke, 2003; Dovlo, 2003).

We should rather implement measures such as motivation and career development programmes just to mention a few to retain them because no serious tertiary institution would like to lose its experienced faculty members especially in our quest to attain tertiary status.

Thirdly, effort should be made to prioritize Research and Publications in Health Training Institutions. There is great relevance to research in education. Apart from ensuring an in-depth knowledge over a topic, scientific and historical research papers also contribute to the world of knowledge. These journals

or papers become the helping hands for the students in future guiding and helping them in research. Students need to understand the role of scientific research in society and the importance of scientific research in education as it will ultimately reward them in return. The research and publication therefore have the following benefit in tertiary education;

- a. **Enhancement of Teaching Practices:** Teaching methodologies will certainly develop if the faculty members tend to do more research and analysis over the topic. This is referred to as research-oriented teaching, where the educators are engaged in acquiring knowledge and information outside the textbook, to get modern and innovative information over a subject for the students and evidence based clinical practice.
- b. **Students Tend to Learn Effectively:** Students tend to learn more proficiently when they learn through research activities. Research-based learning supports the genuine interest of a student while learning about a particular topic. Guided by senior professionals and faculty members, students get clarity of concept about a particular subject.
- c. **Encouragement of Research-Based Practice and Knowledge Production:** Promoting motivation and encouragement among the students to advance further regarding the topic and publish their own articles, implementation of research activities in studies can be of high significance. The educational institutes must understand the significance of research and design their curriculum accordingly by assigning some senior faculty members to work solely for research and journal publications.
- d. **A Chance of Getting Admission into Top Colleges:** Most of the universities will offer admission to the students if their research paper gets published in reputed scientific journals. The students, who have proficient research papers available in their names, possess a maximum chance to get a scholarship to study in the top universities of the world. Apart from that, students can also apply to different courses and scholarships worldwide seeking admission based on their research works.
- e. **Helps in Building a Professional Career:** Considered as one of the requirements for 2nd and 3rd degree students and for promotion on the job, journal paper adds glory in the professional careers of the students. With more acquired knowledge through research methodologies, a person can share knowledge with the world by teaching or assisting fellow students in research activities and journal publications.

For the Health Training Institution to attain tertiary status therefore, it is of utmost importance that every institution should make the research and publication its priority. I am therefore appealing to the Colleges, HTI and MOH to facilitate processes to improve research and publication in our institutions. I would also entreat my colleagues of the most “double profession” to avail yourselves to learn the skills of research and publication to improve our profession and academic career. As saying goes that in academia you either “publish or perish”.

So in order not for us tutors perish, we need to research and publish.

1. Improving our knowledge in Accreditation Requirement and Procedures

Accreditation is a quality assurance process that colleges, universities and education institutions or programs undergo to confirm that they meet a strict and recognized set of services and operational standards. Accreditation may be assessed by private, nongovernmental and government accrediting agencies that have been created specifically to review education institutions and programs and give accreditation before institutions are setup to run educational programmes. In Ghana, the institutions mandated to perform that function is Ghana Tertiary Education Commission (GTEC) and in the case of

the Nursing and Midwifery Institutions, Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) of Ghana. The objectives of the Commission are to regulate tertiary education in all forms with a view to promote;

- a. efficient and effective administration and accreditation of tertiary education institutions;
- b. principles of the provision of consistent quality of service by tertiary education institutions;
- c. advancement and application of knowledge through teaching, scholarly research and collaboration with industry and public sector;
- d. advance high professional standard in Nursing and Midwifery.
and
- e. the development of appropriate human capital for the sustainable advancement of the national economy.

The importance of accreditation to tertiary education is that it; Creates a set of quality standards for all education institutions or programs, provides access to state funding and maintains private sector confidence.

Furthermore, accreditation aims to ensure accountability of schools and degree programs which boosts public trust and confidence. When an institution or degree program is properly accredited, you are able to measure its overall quality without having to conduct a detailed analysis on your own.

The Health Training Institutions and for that matter Nurse Educators are therefore required to study the processes and procedures of accreditation of NMC and GTEC to acquire one for their institutions and programmes to legalize their operations to tertiary status. We should do away with the old mentality that HTIs are government owned institutions and therefore cannot be closed down by the regulatory bodies. We should not perceive the policies and recommendations of these regulatory bodies as nuisance but, rather see them as patterns to ensure quality professional education to attain tertiary status.

2. The need to Improve Library Facilities

Libraries play a fundamental role in enhancing the learning experience, providing students with all the materials and services they need to improve their knowledge. Currently, libraries are offering different services aiming to improve the student experience, including;

- a. a physical space where learners can find various materials such as books, dictionaries and encyclopedias;
- b. an area where students can chill-out and relax by listening to music or reading books;
- c. a place where students are able to find international magazines and discover what's going on worldwide;
- d. an independent study area as well as collaborative learning spaces where students can meet up with other learners to complete group projects.

In addition to the above, many tertiary institutions libraries provide students with tutoring support. By being quiet places, libraries are the best areas where students can receive support to solve their questions and problems, enhancing their study experience. Also, many libraries give learners the possibility to use computers and engage with digital resources that cover different subjects. Through the use of computers, students can search their sources quickly, write their assignments and check the plagiarism percentage of their written work.

In view of the above, it is clear that tertiary institutions cannot function effectively without a well-resourced library. The Health Training Institutions should therefore invest in their libraries if they want to achieve tertiary status.

3. Improvement in Skill Laboratory facilities

Nursing education is a compilation of theory and practice components, and covers cognitive, affective, and psychomotor learning fields. The nursing skills laboratory (NSL) is the most important field for psychomotor skills training. The purpose of NSL work is to:

- a. teach nursing students psychomotor skills and nursing care in a safe environment.
- b. provide a conducive laboratory environment that gives students the chance to "learn by practice".
- c. provide a controlled and safe learning environment and it gives students the opportunity both to learn psychomotor skills and combine theory with practice, allowing them to experience self-learning and helping them to enhance their readiness for an actual clinical environment.
- d. provide a variety of simulation methods which are included in skills training during NSL.
- e. enhance the use of simulations, mannequins and interactive videos, as well as critical thinking and making decisions by different techniques, such as role-playing, as well as activities designed to demonstrate the skills and imitate an actual clinical environment.

It is therefore important to note that NSL are seen as very essential in the health training institutions to train nurses and midwives. Hence the need to improve our skills laboratories to a modern standard to ensure proper training of nurses and midwives to meet the current health challenges.

4. Improving Information and Communications Technology (ICT)

Information and Communications Technology (ICT) refers to the merging of audiovisual and telephone networks with the computer single unified system of cabling. Thus, ICT includes any communication device – including radio, television, cell phones, computer and network hardware, satellite systems, etc. ICT has the proven power to change the world. The role of ICTs in education is becoming more and more critical. The higher education sector has advanced with the help of various ICT tools such as smart devices, smartboards, online classrooms, digital cameras, projectors, video conferencing tools, audio recording tools, and many more. With the introduction of ICT and various 'EduTech' tools, students are no longer restricted to learning from the textbook, class lectures, and presentations. With the help of the internet and ICT tools, higher education learners can access a variety of sources for information, including videos, documentaries, podcasts, and speeches by experts.

ICT in Health Training Institutions could improve engagement and knowledge retention: When ICT is integrated into lessons, students could become engaged in their work. This is because technology provides different opportunities to make it more fun and enjoyable in terms of teaching the same things in different ways.

With the introduction of the online licensing examination by NMC which has improved the standard of the examination to international level, it has become indispensable to improve the ICT facilities in our colleges. This would enhance teaching and learning and add value to the institutions to function as tertiary.

5. The need to Improve Infrastructure

Infrastructure plays an important role in education sector. Effective infrastructure planning for educational institutions is one factor that creates positive and conducive atmosphere for a student's learning. Be it a theory or a practical class, it must encourage students to get actively involved.

Classroom design, auditoriums, laboratories, campus area etc. are crucial elements of a learning environment. Classroom environment is one of the most important predictors of a student's achievement, where environment and design elements of the institution infrastructure have considerable impact on student's academic progress.

Classrooms are the backbone of any educational institution. Classrooms must also be well equipped with the latest technology like Audio-Visual systems, projectors, and Wi-Fi hotspots. Classroom arrangements must encourage students to work individually and as a team. A flexible learning place is the new trend that enables all of these.

Poor building conditions especially in Higher Education Institutions such as dark classrooms with no proper ventilation, broken furniture, leaky washrooms, poorly maintained cafeterias and pantry areas, messed-up library arrangement creates a negative environment and this adversely affects student's learning outcome.

The importance of the social environment in students' life cannot be overemphasized. One of the key features students and their parents are concerned about when enrolling in a tertiary institution is the availability of student housing / hostel. The significance of housing as a major determinant of man's welfare, life sustenance and survival cannot be over emphasized. It has and will always be a prime concern to individuals, family, community and the nation at large. Housing is paramount to human existence as it ranks among the top three needs of man. Its provision has always been of great necessity to man. As a unit of the environment, housing has profound influence on the health, efficiency and social welfare of the community.

“Students' housing form part of the facilities that students take into consideration before making a choice of the school they intend to attend among other considerations” (Price et al., 2003). This therefore makes it imperative for schools to give students housing a top priority while enhancing the reputation of the school among other contemporaries.

The students' housing is said to include facilities such as bedrooms which can serve the dual purpose of study and sleeping, bathrooms and toilets, kitchen, laundry, recreational areas and access to internet services as this further enhance the study-learning experience. Abramson (2009) on his part, stated that “the student housing can be further made exciting by providing further facilities such as ATM machines, car park, mini markets, bookshops and cafeterias within the precinct of the students' housing”.

Infrastructure should not just focus on facilities for students, but also for faculty members and other staffs. The staff of the colleges should be given comfortable office to enhance academic performance. In addition, staff accommodation should be provided to motivate staff to be retained in our institutions. It is therefore important that, in planning for infrastructure development in our institutions faculty members and other staff should be taken into consideration.

Institutions must consider recreational centers such as space for indoor activities, studios for musical performances, gym, etc. as an integral part of education infrastructure rather as an add-on. Recreational centers with the right kind of furniture that helps create conducive atmosphere for students to spend time inside the campus for longer duration. The playground is another vital component of educational infrastructure. It contributes to the physical and mental wellness of a student and creates a positive atmosphere in the campus. Playgrounds must be multi-functional, flexible and safe. It must also be spacious enough to support various sports at the same time.

Having realized the importance of infrastructure in educational institutions and for that matter tertiary institutions, it is very crucial that HTIs should make infrastructure development one of their utmost priorities if we want to attain tertiary **status**.

Good governance is principally important in higher education, because a tertiary institution is, in many ways, a much more complicated organization than a business, and governance in tertiary education must provide a framework for a truly variegated group of stakeholders. Nonetheless, the basic principles of corporate governance find application in higher education governance as well.

Having principles that are analogous to those in business does not mean that leadership in tertiary education should behave like business people. What that mean is that good governance direct the way in which leadership pursues its objectives in any organization.

The objective, for higher education, is knowledge. “Knowledge is higher education’s core business: However broadly or narrowly we define it, knowledge is the material. Research and teaching are the main technologies,” as one commentator puts it. Good governance drives performance in the pursuit of knowledge, and manages the risks involved.

It is the role of good governance to enable tertiary institution to manage relations among these stakeholders such as advisory board, management, faculty and other staff and to ensure that sustainability is achieved. “Sustainability starts and finishes with governance”. A tertiary institution cannot flourish without adherence to its principles.

Good governance and leadership style inform and facilitate decision-making which, in turn, enables institutions to grow and prosper.

Leaders in academic tertiary institutions need to ensure their institutions have the facility to respond quickly and constructively to the almost constant challenges it faces. To do this they need to lead by positioning and most significantly implementing effective change through creating a supportive working environment for their staff – one that fosters and sustains the required changes and also allows for successful implementation of new initiatives for higher academic achievement.

The modern tertiary education system also thrives on Transformational Leadership where collaboration and inspiration are the keys to it success. This style involves a heavy emphasis on teamwork, which includes delegating tasks to others as needed. In order to use this style effectively, it’s important for you to know how to motivate others and provide ways to empower them. When you use a transformational leadership style, you’ll need to have excellent communication skills and be comfortable aiming higher in terms of setting goals and objectives. This type of leadership style focuses on helping others grow while also encouraging them to work as a team and develop mutual respect and trust.

To achieve tertiary status therefore, the colleges must have statutes and policies that should be used to govern the institutions and should be followed by authorities. The era where some of the institution are being run under the whims and capris of individual’s heads of institutions should be a thing of the past but they should be made to follow due process in decision making.

Conclusion

As nurse educators who have been tasked with the onerous responsibility to advance the training of highly knowledgeable, skilled and specialist nurses and midwives at the tertiary level. It is important for nurse educators to update our knowledge and skills in the modern system of running tertiary institutions. This could be achieved through postgraduate and specialist training in the relevant subject areas to build

strong, robust and respected faculties, the need for tutors to upgrade our skills in research and publications to improve knowledge in teaching and learning. These and many other measures like being abreast with accreditation procedures, improving facilities such as library, ICT and skill laboratories, general infrastructure and proper and efficient governance system coupled with good leadership style to reflect on the contemporary tertiary education system. If the above measures are properly implemented by all stakeholders, we shall be on the high pedestal to attain tertiary status as envisaged by MOH.

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