Postgraduate nursing education in Nigeria: understanding registered and graduated students’ experiences in their journeys to programme completion or withdrawal.

Background:
Nigerian nursing education grew from initially limited numbers of missionary establishments to a more substantial expansion of urban hospital-based schools from 1945. Postcolonial emancipation sparked the University of Ibadan into opening the first Department of Nursing in Nigeria in 1965.

The first postgraduate nursing programme commenced in 1988 at the Obafemi Awolowo University, Osun State. The University of Ibadan in Oyo State and the University of Nigeria, Nsukka in Enugu State started their own postgraduate courses in 1996 and 2003 respectively.

These three universities remain the main postgraduate nursing education providers in Nigeria for a population of approximately 180 million people; they are therefore significant players in developing nursing practice and research in Anglophone Western Africa. Nonetheless, Government and professional stakeholders, including the Nigerian Nursing and Midwifery Council, are concerned by the low graduation rate of these students (10%), and their relatively high rate of attrition (20%).

Aims:
The study has three aims which include to investigate the experiences of postgraduate nursing students enrolled with a postgraduate nursing education programme in Nigeria; explore the factors influencing the postgraduate nursing students’ experiences with the postgraduate nursing programmes; and examine the participant’s assessment of the overall performance of the postgraduate nursing education programmes in Nigeria to date in relation to students’ experiences.

Method:
The research method used was qualitative inquiry utilising face-to-face interviews, the methodology being guided by a critical realist perspective with regard to agency and structure. The participants include those postgraduate nursing students and lecturers of the three universities mentioned above. Other participants included the staff members of nursing education coordinating bodies in Nigeria. 35 participants were recruited for the study. They were recruited to this study purposively and by snowballing. The data collected were analysed thematically.

Results:
The key findings reveal that students’ experiences were challenging and rewarding.

Factors influencing students’ experiences with completion period

- Students
- Lecturers
- Policy issues
- Social structures and mechanism
- Others
- Full-time student, full-time worker, and family issues
- Bossy
- Programme structure
- Foundational issues
- Gender issues
- Lack of interest and motivation
- Nonchalant to students’ plight
- Inadequate human/material resources, and supportive environment
- Leadership and professional autonomy
- Students over depend on lecturers
- No commitment
- Key actors not nurses – lack professional autonomy
- Political structure
- Too strict for comfort
- Few universities offer the PG programmes
- Contextual issues
- Ineffective supervision
- Disparity in remuneration
- Policy issues
- Inadequate human/material resources, and supportive environment
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- Few universities offer the PG programmes
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- Ineffective supervision
- Disparity in remuneration

Conclusion:
Postgraduate nursing education started in Nigeria in 1988. There is a delay in programmes completion period as a result of multiple factors, and the attrition rate is moderately high. Although the overall performance of the programmes is not encouraging, there is a high prospect for improvement.