Changes in Nursing Education in Germany – Intentions and Effects of the Reform

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Paris, 02. April 2025

Agenda

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Introduction

Nursing profession in Germany facing profound transformation through the “Act on the nursing professions” (“Pflegeberufegesetz) of 2020

Challenges:

- Demographic shifts requiring more care professionals
- Advancements in medical technology
- Changing societal expectations of nursing care
- Persistent shortage of skilled workers

Reform aims:

- Make the profession more attractive to nurses
- Increase professional development opportunities for nurses
- Better address evolving professional requirements

2. Characteristics of the reform

Core elements of the reform (implemented 2020):

- **Generalist apprenticeship** covering all care sectors (EQF Level 4) and replacing three separate training tracks (adult, pediatric, geriatric)
- New **university-based education pathway** (EQF Level 6)
- **Reserved tasks** for nursing professionals (§ 4 PflBG)
- **Strengthened practical instruction**: Enhanced requirements by training and examination regulation

2. Characteristics of the reform

Structure of the New Nursing Apprenticeship

- **Duration:** 3 years
- **Structure:** Combined school-based education and workplace training (dual structured)
- **Workplace learning:** Approximately 50% of the whole apprenticeship
- **Practical instruction:** 10% of workplace training time must be structured practical instruction
- **Wages:** 1.100-1.500 €
- **Providers:**
    - Theoretical education: Nursing schools
    - Practical training and instruction: Hospitals, long-term care facilities, outpatient services

Before 2020

Separate Apprenticeships
(3 distinct professions)

Elderly Care Nurse
(Altenpfleger/in)

General Nurse (Krankenpfleger/in)

Pediatric Nurse
(Kinderkrankenpfleger/in)

Apprenticeship
(3 years, highly specialized)

Limited Academic Integration
(Few university programs)

After 2020

Generalist Apprenticeship
(Unified nursing profession)

Registered Nurse (Pflegefachfrau/-mann)

Specialization Options
(Optional specialization in final year)

Apprenticeship
(3 years, highly specialized)

Enhanced Academic Pathways
(Integrated in the national framework)

2. Characteristics of the reform

- Students sign training contracts with practice institutions (hospitals, nursing homes, etc.)
- Theoretical part of apprenticeship takes place in nursing schools
- Practical training occurs across multiple care sectors (generalist approach)
    - Workplace-based practical training and instruction
- Strong training and examination regulation defines objectives and competencies
- Recommended curriculum framework for theory and practice

3. Research on the introduction of the new nursing training 2021-2024

BENP Project mandated by BIBB, Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training

- **Research design:** Mixed methods
- **Qualitative component:** Interviews with stakeholders (~ 400 interviews nationwide)
- **Quantitative component:** Longitudinal panel survey of apprentices (~ 1.400)
    - Three survey periods (2021, 2022, 2023)
    - First cohort under new regulations

3. Research on the introduction of the new nursing training

Qualitative Interviews	Quantitative Surveys
Nationwide, interviews were conducted with individuals responsible for training companies, nursing schools, universities, and coordination offices. These interviews focus on six thematic priorities.	Apprentices and students in all federal states were be surveyed once a year for three years via a questionnaire regarding their experiences with the new nursing education.

2021
- Oragnisational and content-related cooperation at learning locations
- Training network

2022
- Practical instructions
- Right to choose professional path

2023
- Practical supervision
- Exams

2021
1st. Survey
1st Training/ Academic year

2022
2nd Survey
2nd Training/ Academic year

2023
3rd Survey
3rd Training/ Academic year

How is the new training being implemented by the training companies, nursing schools and universities?

What are the success factors and obstacles in this change process?

What are the experiences of students with the new training program?

4. Important results at a glance: Apprentices' Perspective on Practical Instruction

- Only ~ 20% of apprentices receive legally required amount of instruction
- Average of ~ 16 practical instruction sessions per year
- Average duration: 3-4 hours per session
- High rating of importance but insufficient implementation:
  - Regular instruction neccesary
  - Debriefing of work tasks neccesary
- Complementary learning often occurs with:
  - Nursing staff
  - Other students
  - Other health care workers

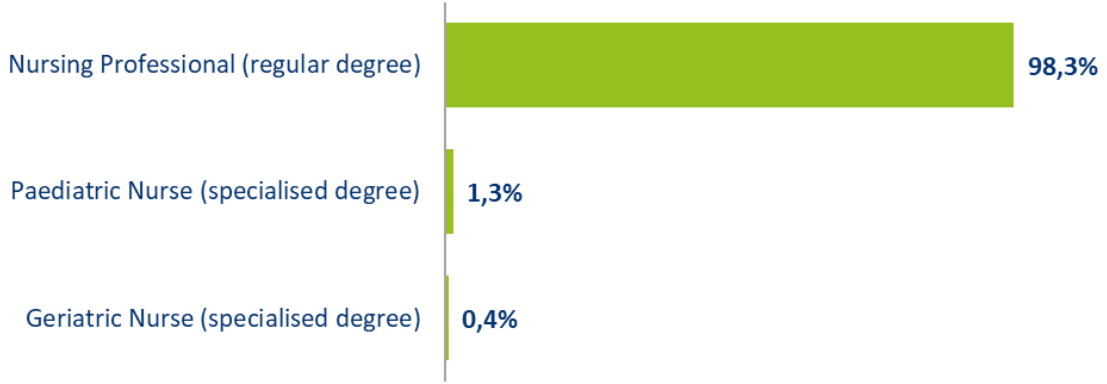
4. Important results at a glance: Choice of Qualification

Separate professional qualifications:

- Apprentices can choose specialized qualifications instead of generalist degree
- Decision possible until end of second year
- Requires specialization in chosen field during third year

With which professional nursing degree will you complete your nursing training?

3rd Survey period (3rd year of education): *n* = 687



5. Discussion: Challenges in Implementation

- COVID-19 pandemic coincided with reform launch
- Limited by structural unfavorable circumstances:
  - General shortage of nursing staff
  - Shortage of qualified practical instructors
  - Limited access to certain practice areas (especially pediatrics)
  - Competing demands between care provision and training/instruction
- Tension between theoretical education and practical training
- Uncertainty about competencies of the new apprentices
- Spezialized qualification might be terminated

5. Discussion: Success Factors

- High level of acceptance of changes among stakeholders
- General commitment to implementation in theory and practice
- Creative solutions to overcome limitations
- Increased standardization of practical training
- Broader range of professional development opportunities
- Enhanced professional flexibility for further nurses

6. Conclusion

1. **Address the Theory-Practice Gap**
   - Create mechanisms to ensure alignment between theoretical education and workplace realities
   - Establish mandatory communication channels between educational schools and practice sites
2. **Secure Adequate Resources for Workplace Learning**
   - Provide dedicated time for practical instruction protected from staffing pressures
   - Address the conflict between service delivery and training obligations
   - Consider the impact of staff shortages on training quality
3. **Invest in „Train the Trainer & Instructor“**
   - Develop robust qualification programs for workplace instructors
   - Establish continuing education requirements to maintain quality
   - Support instructors in implementing competency-based assessment