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CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION AMONG REGISTERED NURSES AT A TERTIARY CARE HOSPITAL IN HYDERABAD AND JAMSHORO, PAKISTAN: A CROSS-SECTIONAL STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Background: Continuing professional education (CPE) enables registered nurses to update their knowledge and skills and maintain competent clinical practice. However, participation may be limited by individual, organizational, workload, and resource-related barriers. This study explored CPE participation, perceived opportunities, and challenges among registered nurses working in a tertiary care hospital.

Methods: A cross-sectional study was conducted at Liaquat University Hospital, Hyderabad and Jamshoro, over six months following approval of the study synopsis. A purposive sample of 132 registered nurses with at least six months of clinical experience was recruited. Data were collected using a structured, self-administered questionnaire addressing demographic characteristics, CPE participation, opportunities, and challenges. Data were analysed using SPSS version 27. Frequencies and percentages were used to summarize the findings, and chi-square tests were used to examine associations.

Results: Of 132 registered nurses, 41 (31.1%) reported participating in CPE, while 91 (68.9%) had not participated. Personal motivation and professional growth were the most frequently reported opportunity (52/132; 39.4%), followed by professional advancement and recognition (42/132; 31.8%) and institutional/administrative support (38/132; 28.8%). Personal and organizational barriers were the most frequently reported challenges (76/132; 57.6%), followed by workload and time constraints (30/132; 22.7%) and financial/resource barriers (26/132; 19.7%). Overall, 47.7% perceived opportunities as minor and 63.6% reported major challenges. Opportunity level was associated with CPE participation ($p=0.04$), as was challenge level ($p<0.001$).

Conclusion: CPE participation was low among the nurses in this study. Personal and organizational barriers were the most commonly reported challenges, while motivation and professional growth were prominent perceived opportunities. Institutional strategies that provide protected learning time, supportive leadership, flexible scheduling, and access to educational resources may help improve participation.

KEYWORDS: continuing professional education; registered nurses; professional development; barriers; opportunities; Pakistan.

INTRODUCTION

Continuing professional education (CPE) is an important component of nursing practice because clinical knowledge, technologies, and standards of care continue to evolve. Through workshops, seminars, conferences, online learning, and in-service education, nurses can update their knowledge, strengthen clinical skills, and support the delivery of safe and effective patient care. Continuing professional development is also associated with professional confidence, career development, and the ability to apply evidence in clinical settings [1–3].

Nurses' participation in continuing education is influenced by both individual and workplace conditions. Motivation, perceived relevance of learning, supportive leadership, and a positive organizational culture can facilitate participation. Conversely, workload, limited time, fatigue, inadequate resources, financial constraints, and weak managerial support may restrict access to professional learning [1,2,4]. Work-based learning, mentoring, supervision, and peer learning may also provide practical routes for ongoing development when formal educational opportunities are difficult to access [2,5].

Although the importance of continuing education is widely recognized, the availability of opportunities does not necessarily ensure that nurses can participate. Understanding the factors that facilitate or hinder participation in a particular clinical setting is therefore important for planning relevant and accessible professional development activities. This study examined participation in CPE and explored the perceived opportunities and challenges among registered nurses at Liaquat University Hospital, Hyderabad and Jamshoro, Pakistan.

Aim and objectives

The aim was to explore the challenges and opportunities related to continuing professional education among registered nurses working at a tertiary care hospital.

- To identify barriers that hinder registered nurses' participation in CPE.
- To explore factors and conditions that facilitate registered nurses' participation in CPE.
- To assess the association between perceived opportunities, challenges, and participation in CPE.

METHODS

Study design and setting

A cross-sectional study was conducted at Liaquat University Hospital, Hyderabad and Jamshoro, Sindh, Pakistan. The study period was six months after approval of the study synopsis.

Participants and sampling

Registered nurses were selected through purposive sampling. The thesis reported a target population of 200 and a sample size of 132, calculated using Raosoft software with a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error. Eligible participants were male or female registered nurses who were willing to participate, had at least six months of clinical experience, and were working morning, evening, or night shifts.

Student nurses, nursing assistants, interns, nurses on long leave or training, nurses unavailable during data collection, nurses working solely in administrative or non-clinical roles, and those who declined participation were excluded.

Data collection instrument and procedure

Data were collected using a structured, self-administered questionnaire titled "Challenges and Opportunities for Continuous Professional Education (CPE) among Nurses." According to the thesis, the questionnaire contained a demographic section and 30 statements across six domains addressing opportunities (institutional support, personal motivation, and professional advancement) and challenges (workload, financial, and personal barriers). Responses were recorded as "Yes" (1) or "No" (0). Domain scores were described as ranging from 0 to 5 and classified as low, moderate, or high using percentage thresholds. The thesis does not provide the exact cut-off thresholds or the full item wording in the main methods section.

Study variables

Demographic variables included age, gender, professional qualification, years of experience, and work shift. The main study variables were participation in CPE, perceived opportunities, and perceived challenges.

Statistical analysis

Data were analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics version 27. Frequencies and percentages were used to summarize demographic characteristics, CPE participation, opportunities, and challenges. The thesis reports the use of chi-square testing for associations. The reported association analyses compared CPE participation with overall opportunity level and overall challenge level. The thesis does not report chi-square statistics, degrees of freedom, confidence intervals, or adjusted analyses.

Ethical considerations

The thesis states that the Ethical Review Committee of Liaquat University of Medical and Health Sciences, Jamshoro, reviewed and approved the study. Permission was obtained from the Medical Superintendent or hospital administration. Written informed consent was obtained after explaining the study, and participant confidentiality was maintained. The ethical approval reference number and approval date were not provided in the thesis text.

RESULTS

Participant characteristics

A total of 132 registered nurses were included. The largest age group was 38 years and above (62; 47.0%), followed by 28–37 years (46; 34.8%) and 18–27 years (24; 18.2%). The gender chart reported 76.52% female and 23.48% male participants. Regarding qualification, 72 (54.5%) held a Post RN BSN, 33 (25.0%) held a diploma, and 27 (20.5%) held a Generic BSN. Most participants had seven or more years of experience (78; 59.1%). The work-shift chart showed that 63.64% worked morning shifts, 21.21% evening shifts, and 15.15% night shifts.

Characteristic	Category	n (%) / reported value
Age	18–27 years	24 (18.2%)
	28–37 years	46 (34.8%)
	38 years and above	62 (47.0%)
Gender	Female	76.52% (chart)
	Male	23.48% (chart)
Qualification	Diploma	33 (25.0%)
	Post RN BSN	72 (54.5%)
	Generic BSN	27 (20.5%)
Experience	1–3 years	20 (15.2%)
	4–6 years	34 (25.8%)

	7 years and above	78 (59.1%)
Work shift	Morning	63.64% (chart)
	Evening	21.21% (chart)
	Night	15.15% (chart)

Table 1. Demographic and professional characteristics of participants (N=132).

Participation in continuing professional education

Only 41 (31.1%) participants reported that they had participated in CPE activities, whereas 91 (68.9%) reported no participation.

CPE participation	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	41	31.1
No	91	68.9
Total	132	100.0

Table 2. Participation in CPE among registered nurses.

Perceived opportunities for CPE

Personal motivation and professional growth was the most frequently reported opportunity (52; 39.4%). Professional advancement and recognition was reported by 42 (31.8%), while institutional and administrative support was reported by 38 (28.8%). When opportunity levels were considered overall, 63 (47.7%) were classified as minor, 33 (25.0%) as moderate, and 36 (27.3%) as major.

Reported opportunity	n	%
Institutional and administrative support	38	28.8
Personal motivation and professional growth	52	39.4
Professional advancement and recognition	42	31.8

Table 3. Main perceived opportunities for CPE.

Overall opportunity level	n	%
Minor	63	47.7
Moderate	33	25.0
Major	36	27.3
Total	132	100.0

Table 4. Overall perceived opportunity level.

Challenges affecting CPE

Personal and organizational barriers were the most frequently reported challenge category (76; 57.6%). Workload and time constraints were reported by 30 (22.7%), and financial and resource barriers by 26 (19.7%). In the overall classification, 84 (63.6%) participants reported major challenges, 22 (16.7%) moderate challenges, and 26 (19.7%) minor challenges.

Reported challenge category	n	%
Personal and organizational barriers	76	57.6
Workload and time constraints	30	22.7
Financial and resource barriers	26	19.7

Table 5. Main reported challenges affecting CPE.

Overall challenge level	n	%
Minor	26	19.7
Moderate	22	16.7
Major	84	63.6
Total	132	100.0

Table 6. Overall perceived challenge level.

Association of opportunities and challenges with CPE participation

Opportunity level was significantly associated with CPE participation (p=0.04). Among nurses who had not participated in CPE, 47 were in the minor, 25 in the moderate, and 19 in the major opportunity category. Among participants in CPE, 16 were in the minor, 8 in the moderate, and 17 in the major opportunity category.

CPE participation	Minor opportunity	Moderate opportunity	Major opportunity	Total
No	47	25	19	91
Yes	16	8	17	41
Total	63	33	36	132
Reported p-value				0.04

Table 7. Association between opportunity level and CPE participation.

Challenge level was also significantly associated with CPE participation (p<0.001). Among nurses who had not participated in CPE, 69 reported major challenges, 9 moderate challenges, and 13 minor challenges. Among nurses who had participated, 15 reported major challenges, 13 moderate challenges, and 13 minor challenges.

CPE participation	Minor challenge	Moderate challenge	Major challenge	Total
No	13	9	69	91
Yes	13	13	15	41
Total	26	22	84	132
Reported p-value				<0.001

Table 8. Association between challenge level and CPE participation.

DISCUSSION

This study found that fewer than one-third of participating registered nurses (31.1%) reported involvement in CPE, while more than two-thirds (68.9%) reported no participation. This finding indicates a substantial gap between the recognized importance of lifelong learning and reported engagement in formal or organized professional education in the study setting. Continuing professional development is intended to maintain and strengthen nurses' knowledge and clinical capabilities; however, participation depends on the relevance and accessibility of learning opportunities and the support available in the workplace [1–3].

Personal motivation and professional growth was the most frequently identified opportunity (39.4%), followed by professional advancement and recognition (31.8%) and institutional and administrative support (28.8%). These findings suggest that nurses recognize the personal and career-related value of continuing education. Previous evidence reviews have similarly highlighted internal motivation, practical relevance, supportive leadership, and a positive organizational environment as factors that can strengthen the impact of professional development [1,2]. Nevertheless, motivation alone may not be sufficient when nurses face barriers that prevent them from attending educational activities.

The most frequently reported challenge category was personal and organizational barriers (57.6%). Workload and time constraints (22.7%) and financial and resource barriers (19.7%) were also reported. These findings emphasize that barriers operate at more than one level. Individual circumstances and organizational practices may influence whether nurses can make time for learning, while staffing demands, access to funding, and availability of educational resources may determine whether participation is practically possible. Reviews of nurses' continuing professional development have also described time, workload, organizational culture, leadership support, and the fit between learning activities and clinical needs as important influences [2,3,4].

The overall opportunity classification showed that 47.7% of respondents perceived only minor opportunities, while 27.3% perceived major opportunities. In parallel, 63.6% reported major challenges. Taken together, these results indicate that the study participants generally experienced more substantial barriers than enabling conditions. This pattern is consistent with the low level of reported CPE participation, although the cross-sectional design does not establish that the reported barriers caused non-participation.

A statistically significant association was found between opportunity level and CPE participation (p=0.04). A greater number of CPE participants were in the major opportunity category than in the moderate category, while non-participants were most frequently in the minor opportunity category. Challenge level was also significantly associated with participation (p<0.001); major challenges were more common among non-participants than participants. These associations support the importance of creating accessible opportunities and reducing barriers. However, because the study reports only cross-tabulations and p-values, the magnitude of these associations cannot be quantified from the information available in the thesis.

The findings have practical implications for nursing management and professional development planning. Hospitals may consider establishing regular CPE calendars, aligning content with nurses' clinical learning needs, providing protected time, offering flexible scheduling across shifts, and strengthening managerial encouragement. Financial assistance and accessible educational resources may also help nurses attend

workshops, seminars, and other learning activities. Informal workplace learning, including mentoring, supervision, and peer learning, may complement formal programmes [2,5].

Strengths and limitations

The study provides local data on CPE participation, perceived opportunities, and challenges among 132 registered nurses and reports associations between overall opportunity and challenge levels and participation. Several limitations should be considered. The cross-sectional design does not establish temporal sequence or causality. Purposive sampling at one hospital setting may limit the generalizability of the findings to other hospitals or nursing populations. The thesis does not provide the questionnaire's complete item wording, the thresholds used to classify domain scores, or information on instrument validity and reliability. In addition, the association tables provide p-values but do not report chi-square statistics, degrees of freedom, confidence intervals, or adjusted estimates. Gender and shift are presented as percentages in charts without corresponding frequencies in the thesis tables.

CONCLUSION

Participation in continuing professional education was low among the registered nurses included in this study: 31.1% reported participation and 68.9% did not. Personal and organizational barriers were the most frequently reported challenges, while personal motivation and professional growth were the leading perceived opportunity. Both opportunity level and challenge level were significantly associated with CPE participation. These findings highlight the need for supportive institutional policies, protected learning time, flexible access to educational activities, adequate resources, and active nursing leadership to facilitate continuing professional education.

Recommendations

- Healthcare institutions should establish supportive policies and regular CPE programmes based on nurses' learning needs and clinical requirements.
- Flexible scheduling and protected time should be provided so that nurses from morning, evening, and night shifts can participate.
- Workload and staffing constraints should be addressed to reduce barriers to professional learning.
- Nursing leadership should actively encourage participation and recognize professional development efforts.
- Financial support and educational resources should be made available to improve access to workshops, seminars, and training.

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THESIS

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