

## **A Case Study on Nurses' Perceptions of Continuing Education in a Health Clinic in Kuala Lumpur**

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### **Abstract**

Continuing education is crucial for nurses to enhance skills, adapt to healthcare advancements, and improve care quality. This cross-sectional study explores motivators and barriers to continuing education among 122 nurses (grades U29–U32) at a Kuala Lumpur health clinic. Data collected via online questionnaires and analyzed using SPSS identified motivators like improving care quality (91.8%), career progression (91.0%), and self-confidence (88.5%). Barriers included time constraints (73.0%), financial limitations (74.6%) and domestic responsibilities (82.0%). Findings highlight the need for targeted support to promote professional growth.

**Keywords:** Motivators, Barriers, Continuing Education, Nurse

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### **1.0 Introduction**

Continuing education (CE) is essential for nurses as an effort to maintain professional competency, adapt to advancements in healthcare, and deliver safe, high-quality patient care. The rapidly evolving nature of medical technology, evidence-based practices, and patient care standards necessitates lifelong learning among nurses (King et al., 2021). Continuing Education (CE) not only enhances individual nursing expertise but also plays a critical role in improving patient safety, reducing errors, and strengthening the efficiency of healthcare systems (Rahmayanti et al., 2020). Nurses equipped with advanced skills and knowledge are better prepared to address complex clinical scenarios, contributing to improved patient outcomes and overall healthcare delivery.

In Malaysia, the Ministry of Health (MOH) has prioritized CE by offering post-basic courses in specialties such as midwifery, intensive care, and infection control. These initiatives reflect the government's commitment to fostering nursing proficiency and professional growth. However, despite these opportunities, many nurses face challenges in pursuing CE, including financial constraints, limited time due to heavy workloads, and family responsibilities (Sowtali, 2019). Such barriers hinder their ability to participate in educational programs, thereby impacting their professional development and the quality of nursing care.

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While studies globally have explored motivators and barriers to CE among nurses, limited research focuses on the Malaysian nursing population's specific experiences. This study addresses this gap by examining the motivators and barriers influencing nurses' engagement in CE within a Malaysian health clinic context. By identifying these factors and their implications, this research aims to propose actionable strategies to support nurses' professional growth and the delivery of high-quality patient care.

## 2.0 Literature review

Nurses' participation in continuing education (CE) is driven by both intrinsic and extrinsic motivators. Intrinsic factors include improving self-confidence, achieving job satisfaction, and enhancing patient care quality, fostering personal and professional growth (Reyes & Conde, 2019). Extrinsic motivators, such as career advancement opportunities, higher salaries, and professional recognition, are equally significant (Krespani et al., 2021). Staying updated with technological advancements and evolving healthcare demands is another critical driver, ensuring nurses remain competent in providing high-quality care (King et al., 2021). In Malaysia, the Ministry of Health (MOH) has emphasized CE as a pathway for career progression, aligning with both professional aspirations and societal expectations.

However, numerous barriers hinder nurses from pursuing CE. Financial constraints are a prominent challenge, limiting access to educational opportunities (Mallampati, 2019). Time limitations, exacerbated by heavy workloads and family responsibilities, particularly affect female nurses balancing caregiving roles (Shohhosseini & Hamzehgardeshi, 2020). Structural barriers, including insufficient institutional support, inadequate access to courses, and logistical issues, further deter participation. Additionally, personal factors, such as fear of academic failure or lack of motivation, are more pronounced among nurses with long gaps since their last formal education (Stephan et al., 2020).

In the Malaysian context, barriers are compounded by logistical challenges in rural areas and cultural expectations that often prioritize family over professional development. Despite MOH initiatives to foster skill enhancement through post-basic courses, issues such as funding constraints and organizational workloads persist (Sowtali, 2019). Addressing these motivators and barriers requires strategic interventions tailored to the Malaysian context, including institutional support, financial aid, and flexible learning platforms. This study builds on existing literature to identify solutions for fostering lifelong learning among nurses

## 3.0 Methodology

### 3.1 Research Design

This study utilized a quantitative cross-sectional design to determine nurses' perceptions, motivators, and barriers to continuing education. This approach was chosen for its efficiency in capturing data at a single point in time, offering insights into the participants' characteristics and attitudes.

### 3.1 Study setting

The research was conducted at the Kepong Health Office, Kuala Lumpur, which includes four health clinics and three community clinics. This setting provided access to a diverse group of nurses working under public healthcare services.

### 3.3 Sampling and Participants

A total of 122 nurses from grades U29 to U32 were recruited using convenience sampling from a population of 236 eligible nurses. The sample size was calculated using the Raosoft sample size calculator, ensuring a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error, with an additional 20% adjustment for potential dropout. While the use of convenience sampling introduces potential selection bias and limits generalizability, this limitation was mitigated by targeting a diverse group of nurses across multiple grades and roles within the selected health clinic. This approach aimed to capture a broad range of perspectives, thereby enhancing the credibility and relevance of the findings.

Inclusion criteria required participants to have a minimum of three years of service and able to understand English. Exclusion criteria included community nurses (grades U19-U26), individuals in managerial roles (e.g., matrons and sisters), and contract nurses. The study achieved a 100% response rate, with all 122 invited nurses completing the questionnaire.

### 3.4 Instrument

Data was collected through a structured, self-administered questionnaire adapted from validated tools by Jayamaha et al. (2021) and Onyango (2012). All the questions were in English. The questionnaire had four parts: sociodemographic data, perceptions of continuing education (3-point Likert scale), which is disagree, neutral and agree, motivators for further study (3-point Likert scale), and barriers to continuing education (dichotomous questions). Reliability was confirmed through a pilot study, with Cronbach's alpha values of 0.81 for perceptions, 0.71 for motivators, and 0.81 for barriers.

The questionnaire was distributed online via Google Forms, shared through official WhatsApp groups of the health clinics from October to December 2023. Participants provided informed consent before completing the questionnaire, which required 10-15 minutes.

### 3.5 Ethical Approval

Ethical clearance was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee (REC) of Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) (FERC/FSK/MR/2023/00081), the National Medical Research Register (NMRR) (NMRR ID-23-03136), and the Medical Research and

Ethics Committee (MREC) (MREC ID-23-02070-QTO -IIR). Additional permissions were secured from the Health State Director and the Kepong Health Office to ensure ethical compliance throughout the study.

## 4.0 Results

### 4.1 Sociodemographic characteristics

Table 1 highlights the sociodemographic characteristics of the participants (N=122). Most were female (95.9%) with a mean age of 37.65 years (SD=5.67) and an average work experience of 14.28 years (SD=5.33). The majority were married (95.1%) with an average of 2.43 children (SD=1.38). Half of the participants fell within the RM5000-RM6000 of family household income bracket (41.0%) and lived within 25km of their workplace (78.7%). In terms of education, 76.2% held diplomas, 21.3% had post-basic qualifications, and 2.5% held degrees.

Table 1: Sociodemographic of the participants (n=122)

Variables		n (%)
Gender	Male	5 (4.1)
	Female	117 (95.9)
Age (years)	Min-max=28-54	**37.72 (5.56)
Work experiences (years)	Min-max= 4-32	**14.28 (5.33)
Number of children	Min-max =0-6	**2.43 (1.38)
Marital status	Single	5 (4.1)
	Married	116 (95.1)
	Divorced/ widow	1 (0.8)
Family income	RM3000-RM4000	27 (22.1)
	RM5000-RM6000	50 (41.0)
	RM7000-RM8000	28 (23.0)
	> RM9 000	17 (13.9)
Home location	< 25km from workplace	96 (78.7)
	>25km from workplace	26 (21.3)
Education	Diploma	93 (76.2)
	Post-basic	26 (21.3)
	Degree	3 (2.5)

Note: \*\*Mean (SD)

### 4.2 Perception Towards Continuing Education

The survey data highlights strong support for continuing education among nurses. A total of 111 participants (91.0%) recognized its importance for professional development (Table 2). 103 participants (84.4%) agreed that nursing research is integral to professional growth, and 94 participants (77.0%) expressed a personal inclination toward further studies, reflecting a positive attitude toward lifelong learning. A total of 109 participants (89.3%) advocated for improved opportunities and facilities for continuing education, while 111 participants (91.0%) viewed professional development in nursing as vital to broader health advancements. However, 106 participants (86.9%) acknowledged that pursuing further education requires significant commitment and sacrifices, demonstrating an awareness of the challenges associated with lifelong learning in the nursing profession.

Table 2 Perception Towards Continuing Education (n=122)

Question	Frequency (Percentages)		
	1	2	3
Continuing education is vital to professional development in nursing	0 (0)	11 (9.0)	111 (91.0)
I like to continue my study	4 (3.3)	24 (19.7)	94 (77.0)
Nursing research is vital to professional development in nursing	4 (3.3)	15 (12.3)	103 (84.4)
Opportunities and facilities for continuing education and nursing research should be improved.	2 (1.6)	11 (9.0)	109 (89.3)
Professional development in nursing is an important aspect of health development	0 (0)	11 (9.0)	111 (91.0)
Continuing education requires a major commitment and lots of sacrifices.	2 (1.6)	14 (11.5)	106 (86.9)

Notes: 1=Disagree, 2= Neutral and 3= Agree

### 4.3 Motivator that encourages them to continue their study.

Table 3 outlines the motivators for participants to pursue further studies (n=122). Enhancing the quality of nursing care was the top motivator, with 112 participants (91.8%) agreeing. This was followed by the need for career progression (111 participants, 91.0%), increasing self-confidence and self-esteem (108 participants, 88.5%), changing patient healthcare needs and demands (105 participants, 86.1%), improving curriculum vitae and skills (102 participants, 83.6%), and achieving job satisfaction (98 participants, 80.3%). 47 participants (38.5%) viewed separation from the workplace as a barrier, thus reflecting a noteworthy hindrance for some individuals.

Table 3: Motivator that encourages them to continue their study (n=122)

Question	n (%)		
	1	2	3
Need for career progression	0 (0)	11 (9.0)	111 (91.0)
Job satisfaction	0 (0)	24 (19.7)	98 (80.3)
Improvement in my curriculum vitae and skills	1 (0.8)	19 (15.6)	102 (83.6)
Changing patient healthcare needs and demands	1 (0.8)	16 (13.1)	105 (86.1)
Increase self-confidence and self-esteem	0 (0)	14 (11.5)	108 (88.5)
Increase the quality of nursing care	0 (0)	10 (8.2)	112 (91.8)
Being away from work	22 (18.0)	53 (43.4)	47 (38.5)

Notes: 1=Disagree, 2= Neutral and 3= Agree

#### 4.4 The perceived barrier for nurses to continuing their studies.

Table 4 summarizes the perceived barriers for nurses in pursuing further studies (n=122). Among personal barriers, 89 participants (73.0%) identified time constraints, 100 (82.0%) reported domestic responsibilities, and 91 (74.6%) cited financial constraints as obstacles. Age and physical constraints were perceived as barriers by 73 participants (59.8%). Interpersonal barriers included a lack of co-worker support (66 participants, 54.1%) and a lack of family support (76 participants, 62.3%). Structural barriers were also significant, with 87 participants (71.3%) identifying work commitments, 80 (65.6%) citing lack of accessibility, and 79 (64.8%) noting lack of organizational support as hindrances.

Table 4: Perceived barrier for nurses to continuing their studies (n=122)

Barriers to continuous education		n (%)	
		1	2
Personal barriers:	Time constraints	33 (27.0)	89 (73.0)
	Domestic responsibilities	22 (18.0)	100 (82.0)
	Financial constraints	31 (25.4)	91 (74.6)
	Age and Physical constraints	49 (40.2)	73 (59.8)
Interpersonal barriers:	Lack of co-worker support	66 (54.1)	56 (45.9)
	Lack of family support	76 (62.3)	46 (37.7)
Structural barriers:	Work commitments	35 (28.7)	87 (71.3)
	Lack of accessibility	42 (34.4)	80 (65.6)
	Lack of organizational support	43 (35.2)	79 (64.8)

Notes: 1=No and 2= Yes

## 5.0 Discussion

### 5.1 Nurses' Perceptions Towards Continuing Education

This study highlights that nurses hold a highly favorable perception of continuing education as an essential element of professional development. The survey revealed that 91.0% of participants believed continuing education is vital for advancing their nursing careers and enhancing healthcare quality. These findings align with global literature, including Krespani et al. (2021), who emphasized that continuous learning equips nurses with advanced knowledge and skills necessary to navigate the complexities of modern healthcare. 84.4% of participants acknowledged the significance of nursing research in professional growth, reflecting their understanding of the role of evidence-based practice in improving patient outcomes. This positive perception underscores the commitment of nurses to contribute meaningfully to healthcare through enhanced competencies.

About 77.0% of respondents expressed a personal inclination to pursue further studies, demonstrating a strong attitude toward lifelong learning. This is consistent with the findings of Rahmayanti et al. (2020), which highlighted that continuing education fosters personal growth, job satisfaction, and the ability to meet evolving patient needs. Moreover, the recognition of professional development as a crucial aspect of health system advancement, supported by 91.0% of participants, aligns with Price and Richard (2017), who emphasized that nursing education strengthens both individual expertise and organizational outcomes.

The call for better opportunities and facilities for continuing education was voiced by 89.3% of participants, highlighting the need for institutional support to facilitate learning. This finding aligns with Stephan et al. (2015), who emphasized that accessible training programs and organizational backing are critical to empowering nurses. However, while the perception of continuing education was overwhelmingly positive, 86.9% of respondents acknowledged the significant commitment and sacrifices required, reflecting a realistic awareness of the challenges inherent in pursuing advanced education. These findings collectively underscore the readiness of nurses to embrace continuing education while recognizing the practical obstacles that may hinder participation.

### 5.2 Perceived Motivators for Continuing Education

The study identified various intrinsic and extrinsic factors motivating nurses to pursue continuing education. The findings revealed that 91.8% of participants were primarily driven by the aspiration to enhance the quality of nursing care. It reflects the nurses' dedication to improving patient outcomes and aligns with studies by King et al. (2021), which emphasized that a commitment to high-quality care is a primary driver for professional development. Career progression was the second-highest motivator, voted by 91.0% of respondents, reaffirming the role of education in creating opportunities for leadership roles and career advancement (Silwa & Panta, 2021).

Self-confidence and self-esteem were also identified as critical motivators, with 88.5% of participants agreeing that continuing education boosts their confidence in handling complex clinical situations. This finding is consistent with Kinsella et al. (2018), who highlighted that intrinsic motivator, such as personal satisfaction and professional confidence, play a vital role in fostering motivation for learning. Similarly, the need to address changing patient healthcare needs and demands was reported by 86.1% of respondents. This finding aligns with Jayamaha et al. (2021), who emphasized that evolving healthcare challenges require nurses to remain updated through continuous education.

The improvement of curriculum vitae and acquisition of advanced skills were cited as motivators by 83.6% of participants, reflecting the importance of education in enhancing employability and professional competencies. This result supports the findings of Rahmayanti et al. (2020), who noted that advanced skills contribute significantly to nurses' ability to adapt to dynamic healthcare environments. Job satisfaction was another notable motivator, reported by 80.3% of respondents, underscoring the link between continuing education and increased fulfillment in nursing roles.

These findings collectively highlight that both intrinsic and extrinsic motivators drive nurses to pursue continuing education. Intrinsic factors, such as self-improvement and confidence, align with personal aspirations, while extrinsic motivators, including career advancement and healthcare quality, reflect professional goals. The strong motivational factors identified in this study emphasize the importance of fostering a supportive environment that encourages lifelong learning among nurses.

### 5.3 Perceived Barriers to Continuing Education

While motivators were strongly evident, this study also identified several barriers to continuing education, categorized into personal, interpersonal, and structural challenges. Among personal barriers, domestic responsibilities were the most significant, cited by 82.0% of participants. This finding aligns with Stephan et al. (2015), who reported that family obligations, particularly among female nurses, significantly impact their ability to balance work and education. Cultural expectations in Malaysia, where caregiving responsibilities are predominantly shouldered by women, likely exacerbate this barrier. Financial constraints, reported by 91 of participants (74.6%), highlight the economic challenges nurses face in pursuing advanced education. These findings are consistent with Kielan et al. (2018), who emphasized the cost of education as a significant hindrance for nurses globally. Some people disregard financial constraints when pursuing further studies because of available fundings such as scholarships from government or private sector. People who have strong determination, belief in education's value, and supportive resources also disagree with financial as the barrier to pursuing education.

Time constraints, reported by 73.0% of respondents, underscore the difficulty of balancing professional, family, and educational responsibilities. This aligns with findings by Silwa and Panta (2021), who noted that limited time is a pervasive barrier to continuing education among healthcare workers. Although age and physical constraints were less significant (59.8%), they still present challenges for nurses juggling multiple roles. The need for flexible learning options, such as online courses, could alleviate these challenges.

Interpersonal barriers, such as lack of co-worker support, were perceived as less significant, with 54.1% of participants reporting this as a challenge. This contrasts with Shohhosseini and Hamzehgardeshi (2020), who noted that co-worker support plays a critical role in facilitating or hindering educational pursuits. Similarly, a lack of family support was cited by 62.3% of respondents, indicating that familial encouragement remains an important enabler for nurses pursuing education. These findings suggest that while interpersonal barriers exist, they may not be as influential as personal or structural challenges in this context.

Structural barriers emerged as the most significant challenges. Work commitments (71.3%) and lack of organizational support (64.8%) reflect the high workloads and staff shortages commonly faced by nurses in Malaysia. These findings align with Mlambo et al. (2021), who identified inadequate staffing and inflexible schedules as significant barriers. Accessibility to resources was another key issue, with 65.6% highlighting the need for more flexible and accessible training programs. Institutional gaps, such as insufficient funding and limited educational support, were also noted.

Malaysia's Ministry of Health has made progress in offering CE opportunities, gaps remain in institutional policies and resources. Addressing these structural barriers—through measures such as increasing financial aid, providing study leave, and expanding online learning platforms—is essential to bridging the gap between available programs and nurse participation. These findings emphasize the need for targeted interventions to enable Malaysian nurses to fully engage in continuing education and contribute to the advancement of healthcare services.

## 6.0 Conclusion

This study highlights the significant motivators and barriers influencing nurses' decisions to pursue continuing education in health clinics in Kuala Lumpur. The findings revealed that nurses are highly motivated by intrinsic factors, such as enhancing self-confidence and improving the quality of nursing care, and extrinsic factors, including career progression and the need to address evolving patient healthcare demands. However, barriers such as domestic responsibilities, financial constraints, time limitations, structural challenges like work commitments and limited organizational support hinder their ability to fulfill their educational goals. While the findings emphasize strong motivation among nurses, the barriers underscore critical gaps in the support systems necessary to facilitate lifelong learning. The limitations of findings in this study include its focus on a single health clinic, which may limit generalizability, reliance on self-reported data that may introduce response bias, and its cross-sectional design, which does not capture changes over time. Future research should expand to include diverse healthcare settings across Malaysia and employ longitudinal or qualitative methods to gain deeper insights into nurses' experiences. Policymakers and healthcare organizations must address these barriers by providing financial assistance, flexible working hours, accessible training facilities, and fostering a supportive learning culture. These measures can

empower nurses to overcome challenges and enhance their professional development. The authors have no conflicts of interest, and the findings contribute valuable insights for improving access to continuing education for nurses in Malaysia.

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## Paper Contribution to Related Field of Study

The findings of this study have critical implications for nursing practice, education, and policy. Addressing barriers such as financial constraints, time management, and structural limitations is essential to enhance nurses' access to continuing education. The analysis lacked depth and rigour. It is reflected in presenting the findings of the study which are evidently descriptive in nature. Further exploration could reveal more interesting, or even surprising findings which can be inferred using informed knowledge of the author/s. For example, cross-tabbing between younger and more senior groups from the participants will reveal motivation pattern towards CE. A lot more that can be done in the "digging out" from the collected data which may reveal other valuable findings instead of just superficial patterns of the situation in the context of nursing profession in Malaysia.

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