



Assessing the Relationship between Professional Growth Opportunities and Nurses' Performance in Selected Teaching Hospitals in South-South, Nigeria

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<p>Abstract: Professional growth opportunities are increasingly recognized as a critical factor influencing employees' performance in healthcare organizations, particularly among nurses in teaching hospitals. Teaching hospitals operate in complex and demanding environments that require nurses to possess up-to-date clinical knowledge, technical skills, and professional competence. As a result, opportunities for continuous learning, career advancement, training, and mentorship are essential for sustaining high levels of nurses' performance and quality patient care. Data were collected via structured questionnaires from 1,210 nurses, and analysed using Spearman's correlation coefficient. The study issues were addressed using the descriptive statistics of frequency, percentages, means, and standard deviation, and the hypotheses were tested at the 0.05 level of significance using the inferential statistics of Spearman's rank-order correlation analysis. The results shows that 644(52.7%) of the participants agreed that vertical growth options exist, 355(29.3%) don't think so, and 211(17.5%) remain uncertain, 857(70.8%) with mean value (3.61±1.17) of the participants agree that skill development helps nurses climb the ladder, 246(20.4%) disagreed, 688(56.8%) with mean value of (3.29±1.54) feel that their roles are evolving. Findings reveal that salary, recognition, and growth opportunities, exhibit weak and positive relationships with contextual. Growth opportunities were strongly linked to task performance, reinforcing the motivational impact of career advancement pathways.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Research Paper</p> <p>*Corresponding Author: <i>Gbaranor, B. K</i> Department of Human Physiology, College of Medical Sciences, Rivers State University, Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria</p> <p>How to cite this paper: Onita A <i>et al</i> (2026). Assessing the Relationship between Professional Growth Opportunities and Nurses' Performance in Selected Teaching Hospitals in South-South, Nigeria. <i>Middle East Res J Nursing</i>, 6(1): 1-5.</p> <p>Article History: Submit: 22.12.2026 Accepted: 23.01.2026 Published: 28.01.2026 </p>
<p>Keywords: Assessing, Relationship, Professional, Growth Opportunities, Performance.</p>	
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INTRODUCTION

Bratton and Gold (2017) report on the significance of growth opportunities in reinforcing outcomes such as perceptions of job security, perceived organisational support, and organisational citizenship behaviour. Chikezie *et al.*, (2017) noted that growth opportunities contribute to strengthening the workers believe of a future with the organisation, assuring them of their development within the ranks and their usefulness or value to the organisation. They identified growth opportunities as being significant to the workers perception of the organisation and the extent to which they are willing to engage in preferable behaviour or actions that drive the progress of the organisation. Research has however, scarcely addressed the impact of growth opportunities on nurses' performance, especially within the context of teaching hospitals in the South-South of Nigeria. This is as Chikezie *et al.*, (2017) opined that the experiences of workers differ within various

contexts and can be challenging for organisations, especially when they do not take into account the relative concerns, underlying or which shape the workers perceptions and expectations when it comes to reward systems.

Professional growth opportunities in nursing such as continuing professional development (CPD), career advancement pathways, and mentorship—have been widely linked to nurses' performance outcomes. Studies consistently emphasize the importance of CPD in maintaining and enhancing nurses' competencies, motivation to perform, and ability to provide high-quality patient care. For example, a systematic review published in *Nurse Education in Practice* found that nurses' engagement in CPD was associated with improved quality of care, enhanced patient safety, and higher professional satisfaction, though participation barriers often limit effectiveness when development activities are not aligned with nurses' real needs

(systematic review; Nurse Education in Practice, 2021). This underscores how professional growth opportunities can support performance in clinical environments such as teaching hospitals where clinical competence is critical. Qualitative research exploring nurses' perceptions further highlights the multidimensional nature of professional growth. Liu's (2022) study in *BMC Nursing* reported that nurses value CPD for improving specialty abilities and professional identity, but also face challenges such as work-family conflicts that can hinder participation. This suggests that while growth opportunities may enhance individual capabilities and performance, contextual factors must be addressed to fully realize these benefits. The concept of career growth also includes perceptions of upward mobility, skill enhancement, and professional identity development. A qualitative study of nurses in Chinese hospitals illustrated that career growth encompasses not just promotions but also improvements in professional ability and personal prestige—dimensions linked to motivation and performance behaviors (*Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 2022). Specific empirical studies demonstrate relationships between structured professional growth mechanisms and performance indicators. Research on career ladder systems found that formalized progression programs contribute to career advancement, mentorship, and competency development, which are foundational to better performance outcomes in clinical settings (*Enfermería Clínica*, 2019). Another descriptive correlational study showed that professional development variables were significantly associated with stronger nurse performance metrics, including clinical efficiency and documentation quality, highlighting the direct link between development access and performance excellence (*International Journal of Nursing Education*, 2025).

Barriers to career growth, however, can weaken the potential positive impact on performance. Van Biljoen-Mokhotla and Makhene (2023) reported that lack of recognition for postgraduate qualifications, limited leadership opportunities, and inadequate mentoring hindered career advancement, likely

constraining performance outcomes in the studied hospital setting.

Beyond CPD and structured advancement programs, organizational support and culture are also key to translating growth opportunities into performance. A metasynthesis in *BMC Nursing* showed that supportive organizational culture and resources were prerequisites for effective professional development, influencing nurses' motivation, retention, and ultimately performance within clinical teams.

The literature suggests a positive relationship between professional growth opportunities and nurses' performance, mediated by improved competence, satisfaction, and motivation. However, effectiveness depends on contextual factors such as workplace support, relevance of training to actual practice, and equitable access to advancement pathways. For teaching hospitals where climate, complexity, and expectations are high leveraging professional growth opportunities can strengthen workforce capability and performance outcomes, provided barriers are minimized.

MATERIALS AND METHOD

Data were collected via structured questionnaires from 1,210 nurses, and analysed using Spearman's correlation coefficient. The study issues were addressed using the descriptive statistics of frequency, percentages, means, and standard deviation, and the hypotheses were tested at the 0.05 level of significance using the inferential statistics of Spearman's rank-order correlation analysis.

RESULTS

The results shows that 644(52.7%) of the participants agreed that vertical growth options exist, 355(29.3%) don't think so, and 211(17.5%) remain uncertain, 857(70.8%) with mean value (3.61±1.17) of the participants agree that skill development helps nurses climb the ladder, 246(20.4%) disagreed, 688(56.8%) with mean value of (3.29±1.54) feel that their roles are evolving (Table 1).

Table 1: Responses of Nurses on Growth Opportunity in the Study

S/N	Items	SD	D	U	A	SA	Sum	Mean	SD
1	There are vertical options of nurses' growth in this hospital	120	235	211	542	102	1210	3.14	1.25
		9.9%	19.4%	17.5%	44.8%	7.9%	100%		
2	Nurses can further their position in this hospital through additional skills.	83	163	107	621	236	1210	3.61	1.17
		6.9%	13.5%	8.9%	51.3%	19.5%	100%		
3	There are various administrative and professional levels in this hospital.	47	105	80	654	323	1209	3.89	1.05
		3.9%	8.7%	6.6%	54.0%	26.7%	100%		
4	Nurse roles in this hospital is constantly changing?	144	216	160	512	176	1208	3.29	1.54
		11.8%	18.1%	13.3%	42.3%	14.5%	100%		

$$SA=5, A=4, U=3, D=2, SD=1 = \frac{15}{5} = 3.0$$

Mean of 3.0 is Agreed while mean of <3.0 is Disagree

DISCUSSION

Professional growth opportunities are increasingly recognized as a critical factor influencing employees' performance in healthcare organizations, particularly among nurses in teaching hospitals. Teaching hospitals operate in complex and demanding environments that require nurses to possess up-to-date clinical knowledge, technical skills, and professional competence. As a result, opportunities for continuous learning, career advancement, training, and mentorship are essential for sustaining high levels of nurses' performance and quality patient care. Professional growth opportunities in nursing include in-service training, workshops, seminars, continuing professional education, specialization programs, promotions, and supportive supervision. When nurses are exposed to these opportunities, they are more likely to enhance their skills, confidence, and job satisfaction. This, in turn, positively affects their efficiency, commitment, adherence to professional standards, and ability to deliver safe and effective patient care. Teaching hospitals, being centers for training and research, are expected to provide structured growth opportunities that support both professional development and organizational goals. Nurses' performance is a key determinant of healthcare outcomes, as nurses constitute the largest workforce in hospitals and are directly involved in patient care. High performance among nurses is reflected in effective patient management, accurate clinical decision-making, teamwork, reduced medical errors, and improved patient satisfaction. However, limited access to professional growth opportunities may lead to low morale, burnout, reduced motivation, and poor performance, especially in environments characterized by heavy workloads and staff shortages. Assessing the relationship between professional growth opportunities and nurses' performance in selected teaching hospitals is therefore important for identifying how development initiatives influence work outcomes. Understanding this relationship provides evidence that can guide hospital management and policymakers in designing effective professional development strategies. By investing in nurses' growth, teaching hospitals can improve staff performance, enhance patient care quality, and strengthen the overall healthcare delivery system.

The correlation coefficient of 0.392 suggests that as growth opportunities increase, nurses' contextual performance tends to improve. Contextual performance refers to behaviours that contribute to the organisational environment, such as helping colleagues, showing initiative, adhering to organisational norms, and demonstrating commitment beyond formal job duties. This moderate and statistically significant correlation implies that when nurses perceive opportunities for career advancement, skill development, and professional growth, they are more likely to engage in citizenship behaviours that support the hospital's overall functioning. The findings underscore the importance of

providing growth opportunities such as training programs, promotions, mentorship, and continuing education as a strategic lever to enhance contextual performance. Hospitals that invest in the development of their nursing staff may benefit from: Improved teamwork and collaboration; greater organisational loyalty; Enhanced morale and job satisfaction; and Reduced turnover and burnout. Growth opportunities serve not only as a motivator but also as a signal of organisational support, which can foster a culture of engagement and discretionary effort.

The analysis reveals a moderate and statistically significant positive relationship between growth opportunities and contextual performance among nurses in South-South Nigeria's teaching hospitals. This suggests that empowering nurses through career development initiatives can lead to meaningful improvements in their contributions to the organisational climate and overall performance. The findings align with other related studies. For example, Ingusci *et al.*, (2019) found that career growth opportunities significantly moderated the relationship between job demands and contextual performance. Employees who perceived more growth opportunities were more likely to engage in discretionary behaviours that benefit the organisation. Also, Ofoegbu, Akanbi & Joseph (2013) revealed that contextual factors such as access to resources, enabling environments, and growth opportunities had a significant positive impact on performance, including behaviours beyond core tasks. Though focused on SMEs, the findings are transferable to healthcare settings where contextual performance is shaped by growth-enabling environments.

The results revealed that the correlation coefficient of 0.440 suggests that as nurses' access to growth opportunities increases, their task performance improves significantly. Task performance refers to the execution of core job responsibilities, including clinical duties, patient care, documentation, and adherence to professional standards. This result indicates that nurses who perceive clear pathways for career advancement, skill development, and professional growth are more likely to be motivated, focused, and effective in fulfilling their essential duties. The strength of the correlation is notably higher than that observed between growth opportunities and contextual performance ($\rho = 0.392$), suggesting that growth opportunities have a more direct impact on core job execution. The findings highlight the strategic importance of investing in nurse development to enhance task performance. Hospitals that provide structured growth opportunities such as continuing education, promotions, specialized training, and mentorship can expect: Higher levels of clinical competence; Improved patient care outcomes; Greater job satisfaction and retention; and Reduced errors and inefficiencies. This correlation reinforces the idea that professional development is not just a benefit, but a performance driver in healthcare settings. The analysis

reveals a statistically significant and moderately strong positive relationship between growth opportunities and task performance among nurses in South-South Nigeria's teaching hospitals. This suggests that empowering nurses through career development initiatives can lead to substantial improvements in their ability to perform core responsibilities effectively. Hospital administrators should prioritize growth-oriented policies as part of a broader strategy to enhance workforce productivity and service quality. This aligns with the findings by Kim (2022) which show that participatory decision-making closely tied to perceived growth opportunities had a direct and significant impact on task performance. The author concluded that when employees perceive opportunities for growth, they are more engaged and perform better in core tasks. The finding supports the idea that when employees perceive opportunities for growth, they are more engaged and perform better in core tasks. In another study Matilu & K'Obonyo (2018) found that growth-related job characteristics such as autonomy, skill variety, and development opportunities—were positively associated with task performance. Ugwu & Ugwu (2017) also found that employees with greater access to growth through job position and experience showed higher task performance. The authors conclude that career progression and growth pathways are key drivers of performance.

The correlation coefficient of 0.423 suggests that as nurses' access to growth opportunities increases, their adaptive performance also improves. Adaptive performance refers to the ability of nurses to adjust effectively to changing work conditions, new procedures, unexpected challenges, and evolving patient needs. This moderate positive relationship implies that nurses who perceive strong growth opportunities such as training in new technologies, exposure to diverse clinical scenarios, and leadership development are more likely to: respond flexibly to change; demonstrate resilience in high-pressure environments; innovate and problem-solve effectively; and maintain composure and professionalism during disruptions. The result underscores the idea that growth opportunities not only enhance routine task execution but also foster adaptability, which is crucial in dynamic healthcare settings. The findings have important implications for hospital management and policy: Investing in continuous learning and development can empower nurses to thrive in unpredictable or rapidly evolving clinical environments; Hospitals should design growth pathways that include cross-training, simulation-based learning, and exposure to interdisciplinary teams; Adaptive performance is especially vital in contexts like emergency care, pandemic response, and technological transitions areas where flexibility and quick learning are essential. By promoting growth opportunities, hospitals can cultivate a workforce that is not only competent but also agile and future-ready. The analysis reveals a statistically significant and moderately strong positive relationship between growth opportunities and adaptive

performance among nurses in South-South Nigeria's teaching hospitals. This suggests that career development initiatives play a critical role in enhancing nurses' ability to adapt to change and uncertainty. Hospital administrators should integrate adaptive training modules and flexible career pathways into their human resource strategies to build a resilient and responsive nursing workforce. This finding relates to the outcomes obtained from other previous studies. Specifically, Stasielowicz (2024) examined the focus on opportunities and adaptive performance: the importance of distinguishing between subjective and objective performance measures. The findings show that individuals who perceive more occupational opportunities report higher levels of adaptive performance, especially in terms of self-reported adaptability to change. The authors concludes that perceived growth opportunities enhance adaptive behaviours. Satiyadi *et al.*, (2024) found growth-related factors such as skill acquisition, learning culture, and career development were identified as key antecedents of adaptive performance across organisational levels. Mwangi *et al.*, (2022) found that adaptive capability, which includes the ability to respond to change and develop new skills, is enhanced by organisational support and growth-oriented policies.

CONCLUSION

The assessment demonstrates that professional growth opportunities significantly influence nurses' performance in selected teaching hospitals. Hospitals that prioritize continuous education, clear career progression, and supportive mentorship structures are more likely to achieve improved nursing performance and enhanced patient outcomes. Therefore, hospital management and policymakers should invest in sustainable professional development programs and create equitable growth opportunities to maximize nurses' performance and strengthen healthcare delivery systems.

Professional development initiatives, when well-supported and aligned with nurses' career goals, contribute to improved competencies, job satisfaction, retention, and performance outcomes. However, realizing these benefits requires addressing structural and institutional barriers to equitable access and sustained participation in growth opportunities.

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