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TALENT MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES AND RETENTION OF NURSES IN PUBLIC HOSPITALS IN NAIROBI CITY COUNTY, KENYA

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ABSTRACT

Although Kenya has been striving to increase the number of nurses in its public hospitals, employee retention is a major concern. Turnover due to brain drain, staff shortages and increased workloads for those that remain compromise service delivery, drive up recruitment costs and undermine public confidence in the health care system. The study examined the effect of work environment and career development strategies on nurse retention in public hospitals in Nairobi City County, Kenya. The study was anchored on Human Capital Theory and Organizational Culture Theory. A descriptive research design was used to systematically gather data related to nurses' perceived experiences and outcomes of retention. The study covered six public hospitals, with a target population of 2,220 nurses. A semi-structured questionnaire was used to collect data, comprising Likert-scale and open-ended questions. A total of 263 usable responses were received, representing a response rate of 77.6%. Data were analysed using SPSS, employing descriptive and inferential statistics. The results revealed that career development was positively perceived in terms of career progression and continuing professional development (CPD), although concerns remained regarding career progression and equity of opportunities. The overall work environment was positive, with favourable perceptions of safety and resources, communication and teamwork. Regression analysis revealed that career development (B = 0.207, p less than .001) and work environment (B = 0.418, p less than .001) had positive and statistically significant effects on nurse retention. The overall regression model, incorporating all four original talent management strategies, yielded a coefficient of determination of $R^2 = 0.723$. The study suggests providing equal opportunities for career growth and progression, alongside supportive and well-resourced workplaces, to improve the retention of nurses in public hospitals.

Keywords: Nurse retention, work environment, career development, public hospitals, Nairobi City County.

Background of the Study

Nurse retention is a global priority and a pressing issue with major consequences for the sustainability of health systems and achieving universal health coverage (UHC) (Asamani et al., 2022). Nursing shortages, high turnover rates and skilled nurse migration are major challenges across the world for health systems. Human resources for health (HRH) are a key pillar of effective health service delivery, as recognised by the World Health Organisation (WHO), which states that policies for sustainable human resources are needed (WHO, 2020). Skilled nurses are in high demand in developed countries like the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom, which are implementing strategies to attract nurses from low- and middle-income countries (LMICs). This means that the health workforce is continually lost from the developing world, exacerbating already weak health systems (Nungo, Filippon, & Russo, 2024).

Work environment and career development have become important considerations in addressing nurse retention. Some institutions face issues of talent loss in their workplace, attributed to toxic workplace cultures, inadequate growth opportunities and lack of clarity on human resource policies (Alqarawi et al., 2025). Psychological safety, access to mentorship and recognition at work have also been identified as factors affecting nurse retention (Tancred et al., 2024). Globally, strategies are shifting towards mentorship platforms and professional development. For instance, U.S. hospitals that adopted peer mentoring as part of their nurse induction programmes reported a 30% increase in nurse retention over two years (Ouayogodé et al., 2025). Furthermore, studies have identified working conditions, work-life balance, participation in decision-making, manageable workloads and improved work scheduling as important factors influencing employee retention (Sija, 2022; Bharath, 2023). In India, high levels of burnout among nurses in public hospitals have been associated with the absence of role clarity and career growth opportunities, resulting in mass resignation of nurses (Bhore & Dhanawade, 2025). Similarly, the COVID-19 pandemic exposed unsafe working conditions and inadequate institutional support for frontline nurses (Campbell et al., 2022).

In sub-Saharan Africa, factors contributing to continued nurse attrition include lack of career advancement and promotion opportunities, poor working conditions and inadequate institutional support. In many African countries, including South Africa, Nigeria and Ghana, significant resources are directed towards training nurses, yet they are lost to the international labour market or private sector employment (Muchiri et al., 2023). The low number of trained nurses in public hospitals has also increased workloads, affecting service quality and patient outcomes (Mwasi & Muli, 2024). Although some African countries have introduced strategies such as subsidised housing and other retention initiatives, structural challenges and poor institutional leadership continue to drive nurse attrition (Uneke, 2021). Furthermore, rural bonding schemes and human resource digitisation have been piloted in countries such as Sierra Leone and Malawi to ensure equitable distribution of nurses, although their sustainability remains uncertain (Morison, 2023).

Despite improvements in training and recruitment of nurses in Kenya, nurse retention remains a major problem, particularly in public hospitals in Nairobi. The 2023 Health Labour Market Analysis reveals that Kenya has more than doubled its health workforce over the last decade to about 190,000 health professionals in various healthcare sectors (Kenya Ministry of Health, 2023). However, these achievements have not been sufficient to address high turnover rates of nurses in public hospitals (Mugira, 2024). Inadequate medical equipment and staffing contribute to stress and burnout among nurses, while the lack of career progression, promotion opportunities, specialist training and ongoing professional development makes long-term engagement less attractive (Mutua, 2025). Further, organizational culture and leadership affect nurses' satisfaction and commitment to public services in the long term (Mwasi & Muli, 2024).

Hospitals that focus on a positive work atmosphere and mentoring report lower nurse turnover than hospitals with strict formal structures (Muchiri et al., 2023).

Nairobi's public hospitals are key to offering accessible and affordable healthcare services, particularly to the urban population. The Nairobi City County Health Sector Strategy Strategic Plan (2021–2025) indicates that there are over 100 public health facilities serving a growing population. However, the health system faces challenges, including staff shortages, poor facilities and underfunding. These challenges contribute to employee burnout and place additional pressure on the existing nursing workforce. The successful implementation of supportive work environments and structured career development opportunities is therefore important in retaining and engaging nurses in public hospitals.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the efforts and commitment being invested in nursing education and strengthening the nursing workforce in Kenya, the retention of nurses in public hospitals remains a national concern, particularly in Nairobi City County. This leads to a shortage of nurses and an overload on the existing nurses, which negatively impacts the quality and continuity of nursing care. The capacity of healthcare facilities to provide quality health services is dependent on their ability to recruit and retain skilled nurses, which, as Adams et al. (2021) points out, depends on the implementation and design of good talent management practices. In 2024, there were about 81,564 registered nurses in Kenya, the largest professional cadre in the health workforce in the country (Nursing Council of Kenya, 2024). However, public hospitals continue to face considerable nurse turnover, posing risks to service delivery and increasing recruitment and replacement expenses. The World Health Organization (2025) estimates that there will be about 11.1 million health worker shortages globally by 2030, with Africa and the Eastern Mediterranean regions experiencing the bulk of the shortage.

While the Government of Kenya and other stakeholders have continued to invest in training and deployment of nurses, retention remains a major challenge. The UK-Kenya bilateral labour agreement (BLA), signed in July 2021, illustrates the global push-and-pull factors influencing the migration of healthcare workers. Recurrent problems in source countries, such as Kenya, drive health workers to seek better opportunities elsewhere (WHO, 2023). According to Kiptulon et al. (2025), approximately 800 to 840 nurses apply to the Nursing Council of Kenya for certificates every year to migrate to other countries. The same study found that 81.4% intended to leave their current jobs, while 31.4% intended to leave the nursing profession. It also explored organisational culture, work-related stress and job satisfaction as organisational factors associated with turnover intentions. In Nairobi, key drivers of nurse attrition include low pay, poor leadership, lack of career growth opportunities and substandard working conditions (Mwasi & Muli, 2024). Of particular relevance to this study, inadequate career development opportunities and unfavourable working conditions may undermine nurses' willingness to remain in public hospitals.

Although there is a strong correlation between talent management strategies and employee retention, little research has directly explored this relationship among nurses in public hospitals in Nairobi. Existing local studies have focused mainly on job satisfaction, migration or individual aspects of human resource management. For example, Mutua (2025) studied the migration patterns of healthcare professionals in Nairobi, examining external push factors, such as emigration and burnout, while only briefly analysing internal human resource practices. Mwasi and Muli (2024) examined job dissatisfaction and industrial action, identifying pay and workload as key concerns but excluding structured career development systems. Opanga et al. (2024) reviewed retention strategies in the primary healthcare context generally, without focusing specifically on nurses working in urban public hospitals such as those in Nairobi City County. Consequently, comparatively less attention has been given to the contribution of career development and work environment strategies to nurse retention. The continued loss of skilled

nurses may result in increased workloads, threaten healthcare service delivery and population health outcomes, and increase replacement costs. Nairobi's economy, which accounts for about 27.5% of national gross value added (KNBS, 2024), may also be affected.

Thus, there is an urgent need to investigate the effect of career development and work environment strategies on the retention of nurses in public hospitals in Nairobi City County. Without a clear understanding of these relationships, policies may continue to be enacted and implemented in disjointed and ineffective ways that fail to address important organisational factors contributing to nurse turnover.

Objectives of the Study

General Objective

To examine the effect of talent management strategies on the retention of nurses in public hospitals in Nairobi County, Kenya.

Specific Objectives

1. To determine the effect of career development strategy on the retention of nurses in public hospitals in Nairobi City County, Kenya.
2. To analyze the effect of work environment strategy on the retention of nurses in public hospitals in Nairobi City County, Kenya.

Research Questions

The study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. How does career development strategy affect the retention of nurses in public hospitals in Nairobi City County, Kenya?
2. What role does the work environment strategy play in the retention of nurses in public hospitals in Nairobi City County, Kenya?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Review

Human Capital Theory

The Human Capital Theory was first suggested by Gary Becker in 1964 and states that investing in education, training and skills development is of value to individuals and organizations. The theory views workers as resources to be invested in: their productivity and performance can be improved by strategic and long-term investments in their knowledge, competencies and capabilities (Becker, 1964). Organizations that invest in professional development have a better chance of retaining top-performing staff and achieving institutional success.

Human Capital Theory has been used extensively in the health field to illustrate why staff training, career development and lifelong learning are important aspects of workforce planning and staff retention. Becker's theory has been further generalized to encompass on-the-job training, mentorship, leadership training and organizational learning systems (Sweetland, 1996; Schultz, 1993). However, critics have pointed out that the theory may overestimate economic returns and underestimate structural constraints, such as inadequate institutional financing and inflexible systems that limit the availability of development opportunities (Tancred et al., 2024).

The public health sector in Kenya demonstrates the relevance of Human Capital Theory, particularly in relation to career development for nurses. According to Mwasi and Muli (2024), many health workers in the public sector experience professional frustration because they do not understand the promotion ladder, have limited opportunities for postgraduate training and lack mentoring systems. Nungo, Filippon, and Russo (2024) also highlight that health workers' perceptions of barriers to career progression in public hospitals can substantially affect their decisions to move to the private sector or other countries. Without institutional support for professional development, there can be low motivation, reduced organizational commitment and high turnover. Conversely, employees who have a sense of long-term career opportunities, including continuing medical education, postgraduate scholarships and internal promotions, are more inclined to remain in the public health system. Human Capital Theory therefore provides a basis for understanding the effect of training, education and structured career progression on the retention of nurses in Nairobi's public hospitals.

Organizational Culture Theory

Edgar Schein's Organizational Culture Theory, first published in 1985, states that shared values, assumptions and norms are the core of organizational culture and influence employees' perceptions and interactions with the organization. Schein described organizational culture as a multi-layered structure consisting of three parts: artifacts, espoused values and underlying assumptions, which together influence behaviour, communication, decision-making and employee attitudes (Schein, 1985). The theory suggests that a positive and strong organizational culture can boost employee commitment and cohesion and play a significant role in job satisfaction and retention.

Organizational Culture Theory has been widely used in the healthcare sector to explain differences in employee morale and turnover. One of its advantages is that culture can be influenced by leadership and strengthened through employees' behaviours and routines. However, the theory has been criticised for its complexity and difficulty of measurement because culture is often invisible and deeply rooted. Moreover, there can be differences in culture across departments or units (Alvesson, 2002).

Organizational Culture Theory is relevant to investigating work environment as a determinant of nurse retention in public hospitals in Kenya. Nurses are sensitive to leadership, teamwork, inclusivity and recognition within hospitals. Supportive leadership, effective communication, collaborative relationships, staff appreciation and inclusive organizational cultures help to keep nurses happy, healthy and engaged (Doleman et al., 2025). According to Mutua (2025), poor feedback, strict hierarchies and negative leadership are among the factors that lead to job dissatisfaction and turnover in Nairobi's public health institutions. In contrast, a positive organizational culture based on open communication, participative management, collaboration among peers and staff recognition can improve staff morale and reduce turnover. Organizational Culture Theory therefore provides a basis for examining leadership behaviours, shared norms and workplace climate that influence nurses' engagement and retention decisions in the public healthcare sector in Kenya.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework represents the relationship between the independent variables and the dependent variable. This study focuses on the effect of career development strategy and work environment strategy on the retention of nurses in public hospitals in Nairobi City County, Kenya.

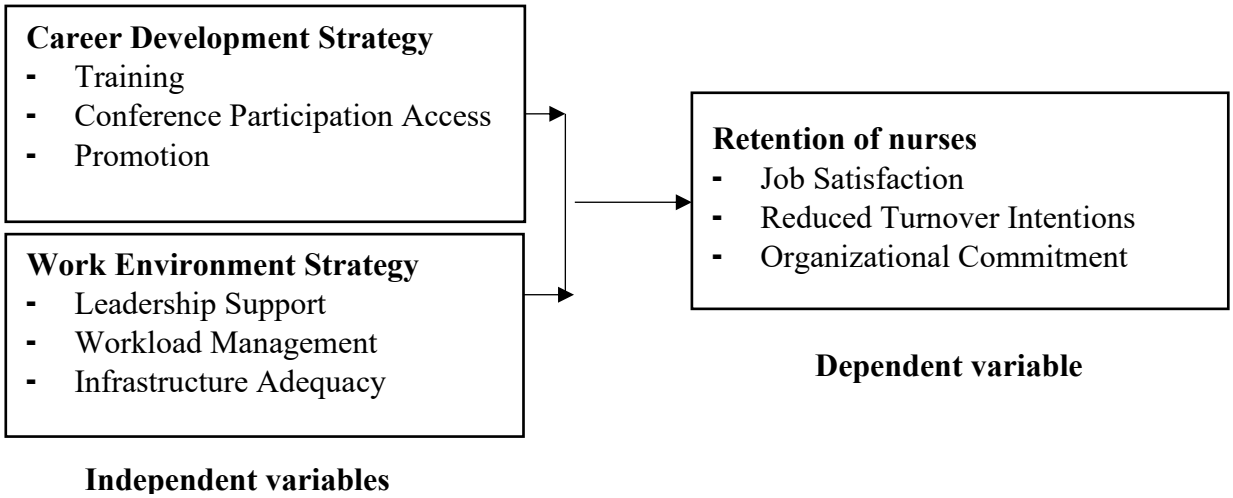


Figure 2.1: Conceptual Framework

Career Development Strategy

Career development is a continuous and systematic process of learning and growth whereby staff members develop new skills and competencies and progress their careers through training, mentorship, promotion or academic development opportunities. In the health sector, where knowledge and practice constantly change, career development is a motivational tool as well as being essential to the provision of high-quality service and stability of the workforce (Morison, 2023).

A lack of career progression has been identified as a key determinant of healthcare worker attrition in sub-Saharan Africa. Msacky (2024) found that the greatest challenge for demotivation and attrition of healthcare workers in the decentralized health system in Tanzania was the perceived lack of training and promotion opportunities. Likewise, Poku et al. (2025) identified a relationship between lack of organized professional development support and turnover intention among Ghanaian nurses, as well as disengagement.

In-service training, postgraduate scholarships, specialist training, clearly defined promotion pathways and mentorship programs are effective strategies for career development. Bradacs et al. (2025) showed that retention rates were significantly higher in hospitals that provided ongoing learning and leadership opportunities, especially for early-career healthcare workers. Morison (2023) identified that the absence of continuing medical education and career planning systems in Sierra Leone prevented retention in rural facilities, encouraging workforce migration to urban facilities or private employers.

Akerele (2025) presents the argument that providing a structured growth pathway can help address brain drain in African public healthcare systems. The findings highlight the importance of institutional support for professional development in encouraging healthcare workers to remain in public service. This should include internal promotion and opportunities to specialise. Furthermore, Adesuyi and Olarinde (2024) found that countries with active continuing professional development (CPD) systems have lower attrition rates, while those that did not prioritise CPD or sponsor further education experienced frequent staff turnover and poor performance.

Nurses in Kenya have complained of job stagnation and lack of professional opportunities for advancement, especially in Nairobi, where they are employed in public hospitals. Ndirangu et al. (2025) found that Kenyan nurses have restricted opportunities for career advancement through promotion and further education, emphasising the importance of clearly defined and

structured career paths, continuous professional education and consistent promotion systems. The Ministry of Health (2023) also noted that while opportunities for learning are available, there are concerns about limited access to training for some healthcare workers and delays in promotion in public health facilities. Career development therefore plays a dual role in enhancing healthcare delivery and increasing employee satisfaction. This study examined career development strategy in relation to training opportunities, promotion opportunities, leadership development and professional support systems.

Work Environment Strategy

The work environment is defined as the physical, psychological, social and organizational environments where employees work. This encompasses the availability of medical supplies, workload distribution, collaboration, management approaches, safety protocols and support networks in healthcare environments. A supportive workplace plays a key role in preventing healthcare worker burnout, increasing job satisfaction and retaining healthcare workers in the public health sector (Deonarain, 2024).

The importance of creating conducive work conditions for the retention of healthcare workers has been highlighted in recent studies conducted in sub-Saharan Africa. For example, in rural Sierra Leone, Morison (2023) reported that poor infrastructure, inadequate staffing and lack of safety protocols were important factors contributing to workforce attrition. The findings were echoed in South Africa, where Deonarain (2024) found that frontline employees working under high stress levels, with limited supervision and management, were more inclined to make plans to leave their jobs.

Factors that affect the work environment include workload, team atmosphere, leadership and physical environment. Kgapele and Thusi (2025) identified high turnover of hospital employees in Polokwane, South Africa, where there was inadequate work or lack of collaboration within the hospital. On the other hand, supportive leadership and teamwork were key factors in decreasing staff intentions to leave. Pillay (2024) also pointed out that technological infrastructure and flexible work schedules were areas of dissatisfaction among younger healthcare workers.

One of the most critical factors in determining a healthy workplace is leadership. According to Ndife (2024), positive and emotionally intelligent leadership improved employee well-being and commitment to hospitals in Nigeria. Conversely, toxic leadership characterized by micromanagement, lack of feedback and authoritarianism has been found to increase stress and intentions to leave (Msacky, 2024; Mutua, 2025).

Workplace safety and emotional health are also important. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Adesuyi and Olarinde (2024) documented that insufficient provision of protective gear, inadequate rest periods, stress and anxiety were significant drivers of absenteeism and resignation in public hospitals during the pandemic in low- and middle-income countries. In Kenya, public hospitals have faced poor staffing, heavy workloads, limited resources and inadequate institutional support, negatively affecting the working environment and nurses' morale. In a study that included 429 nurses from major referral hospitals in Kenya, Kiptulon et al. (2025) reported moderate levels of work-related stress, low job satisfaction and high intentions to quit among Kenyan nurses. The Nairobi City County Assembly (2023) also reported significant staffing shortages, staff burnout, poor supplies and infrastructure at Mama Lucy Kibaki Hospital, and low staff motivation and morale. These challenges highlight the significance of a supportive working environment in enhancing job satisfaction and nurse retention. Supportive and inclusive workplace policies are also essential, particularly gender-sensitive policies. Koloba and Mpanza (2022) pointed out that when women health personnel are not granted maternity leave benefits or experience discrimination in the public service, their probability of remaining in service is significantly reduced.

The work environment has a great influence on nurses' choices to remain or leave. It has a mediating role in organizational commitment, job satisfaction and overall productivity. This study therefore examined how work environment strategy influences nurse retention in public hospitals in Nairobi City County, with particular attention to infrastructural support, managerial encouragement, emotional health and safety measures.

Retention of Nurses

Nurse retention is the capacity of an organization to keep its nurses working in the unit for a longer period of time, decrease voluntary turnover and encourage nurses to stay longer with the organization and be more satisfied with their jobs. Continuity of healthcare services, low recruitment costs and good care outcomes are all critical to nurse retention in public hospitals, particularly in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) like Kenya (Kiptulon et al., 2025). Retention is not just about staying physically; it also involves emotional commitment, job satisfaction and plans to continue working in the same health system or institution. Poku et al. (2025) explain that healthcare workers' retention is a complex phenomenon that depends on leadership support, job satisfaction, salary, workload and promotional prospects. Poor nurse retention affects public health systems through staff shortages, disruption of services, higher patient-to-nurse ratios and loss of institutional knowledge (Msacky, 2024).

Morison (2023) noted that poor working conditions and lack of training opportunities led to high nurse attrition in rural and urban public hospitals in Sierra Leone. Tarpley et al. (2025) also noted that retaining skilled nurses in sub-Saharan Africa requires good systems for supporting nurses and mentoring them. They highlight that nursing education and professional development can only have long-term workforce impacts if sustainable retention strategies are in place.

In Kenya, significant nurse retention problems persist. The Kenya Ministry of Health Health Labour Market Analysis (2023) noted that trained nurses continue to move to private and international health institutions as a result of poor retention mechanisms in public health institutions. Turnover intention, average length of time at the job, retention rate, and results from exit interviews and job satisfaction surveys provide information about factors internal to the organization that influence nurses to leave. Retention policies must be comprehensive and take multiple factors into consideration, including nurse career development, organizational culture and leadership. Bradacs et al. (2025) found that hospitals with supportive management, fair performance assessment systems and employee reward programs had the highest retention rates for early-career nurses.

The dependent variable of this study is nurse retention, examined in relation to career development strategy and work environment strategy. Understanding how these talent management strategies influence nurse retention can provide actionable information to strengthen the nursing workforce and ensure the sustainability of public healthcare services in Nairobi City County.

Empirical Literature Review

Career Development Strategy

Bradacs et al. (2025) conducted a quantitative study on the impact of leadership, job satisfaction and career development on the retention of hospital staff in Romania. Using a sample of 224 healthcare professionals from five public hospitals, the researchers employed structural equation modelling (SEM) and discovered that opportunities for career progression were the most significant positive predictor of retention ($\beta = 0.63$, $p < 0.001$). Hospitals with formalised leadership pathways, academic sponsorships and specialised certifications had higher rates of employee commitment and lower rates of employee turnover.

Morison (2023) undertook a qualitative case study in Sierra Leone to explore the reasons for attrition of primary healthcare workers in rural hospitals. The study, which comprised in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with 57 health workers, revealed that a lack of mentorship, promotion criteria and access to specialist training resulted in many health workers leaving public service. The study highlighted the need for financing continuing medical education and postgraduate studies and incorporating them into national retention policies.

While the Romanian and Sierra Leonean studies differ in methodology and context, both indicate that professional development is a significant factor in retaining healthcare workers. The quantitative evidence links career progression to retention, while the qualitative evidence illustrates the role of mentorship, clear promotion criteria and specialist training in decisions to leave. This implies that career development involves both formal opportunities for advancement and practical institutional support for employees' careers.

Msacky (2024) conducted a mixed-methods study in Tanzania to evaluate the impact of training on the retention of health workers in a decentralised health system. A sample of 165 respondents was used, and both surveys and key informant interviews with district health officers were conducted. Results indicated that districts that had regular refresher courses, recognised informal training and supported upward mobility retained more clinical staff than those that did not. The study reported a staff retention rate as high as 28%, particularly among mid-career workers. Adesuyi and Olarinde (2024), in a literature-based review, also found that increased access to postgraduate training and promotion for nurses was linked to better retention in the public sector. Improved nurse retention in countries such as Rwanda and Ethiopia was associated with the development of in-service academic pathways and performance-based promotion. The authors concluded that structured career development is not only a retention strategy but also an equity mechanism in healthcare workforce planning.

Work Environment Strategy

Deonarain (2024) undertook a descriptive cross-sectional study of 200 frontline healthcare workers in public hospital settings in South Africa to examine the relationship between quality of work life and retention. Using structured questionnaires and statistical correlation analysis, the study revealed that overcrowded wards, inadequate medical supplies and poor communication with hospital administration were significant factors affecting emotional exhaustion and resignation intentions. The study highlighted the need to invest in hospital infrastructure and psychological safety to help reduce attrition. Kgapele and Thusi (2025) used a mixed-methods approach involving questionnaires and key informant interviews with 120 medical staff at Polokwane Provincial Hospital in South Africa. Their findings pointed to the importance of positive management attitudes, rest days and proactive feedback systems in reducing turnover. Open communication and recognition of performance were also associated with higher satisfaction among nurses and junior doctors.

The two South African studies indicate a common relationship between the quality of the working environment and employees' intentions to stay. However, they focus on different aspects: Deonarain (2024) examines physical conditions, supplies and communication, while Kgapele and Thusi (2025) focus on leadership support, rest and feedback. Overall, the findings indicate that the work environment should be considered holistically, encompassing nurses' access to physical resources and the quality of organizational relationships.

Olorunfemi et al. (2024) investigated the “Japa syndrome”—the mass exodus of healthcare workers from Nigeria driven by dissatisfaction with working conditions—in a multi-site quantitative study of 179 nurses from five tertiary hospitals. They found that 68% of nurses were considering leaving their home country because of inadequate leadership support, unsafe working conditions and harassment from patients or senior colleagues. The authors

recommended establishing policies to address workplace toxicity and mentoring arrangements to restore trust and morale.

Molefi and Dzimbiri (2021) studied factors affecting job satisfaction among nurses in four public hospitals in Malawi, focusing on talent management and the physical work environment. A sample of 156 registered nurses was surveyed using Likert-scale questionnaires, and the data were analysed through structural equation modelling. The findings indicated that good working conditions, including access to equipment, reasonable working hours and emotional support, were positive predictors of retention. Burnout, absenteeism and early departure were associated with poor environmental conditions.

Muthuri, Senkubuge and Hongoro (2020) conducted a mixed-methods study to determine factors influencing the motivation and retention of healthcare workers in public and mission hospitals in Meru County, Kenya. The study found that professionals who were less satisfied with their supervisors' supervision, teamwork, and the safety and cleanliness of facilities were more likely to leave. Intention to leave was 34% lower among those who were more satisfied with these conditions. Factors such as workload distribution, equipment availability and timely task delegation were also significantly related to job satisfaction.

The empirical evidence indicates that the work environment is multidimensional, encompassing staffing and workload, physical resources, leadership, communication, teamwork and psychological support. In general, the studies agree that supportive working conditions are associated with retention, although the specific factors identified vary across settings. The Kenyan evidence provides useful contextual insights, but limited evidence specifically examines the effect of multiple work environment dimensions on the retention of nurses in public hospitals in Nairobi City County. This provides a basis for the present study.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a descriptive research design to examine the relationship between talent management strategies and nurse retention in public hospitals in Nairobi City County. The design enabled the systematic collection of quantitative and qualitative data to describe existing conditions and analyse relationships between the study variables (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Kothari, 2020). The study was conducted in six public hospitals: Kenyatta National Hospital, National Spinal Injury Referral Hospital, Mathari National Teaching and Referral Hospital, Mama Lucy Kibaki Hospital, Mbagathi Hospital and Pumwani Maternity Hospital. The target population comprised 2,220 nurses, with individual nurses serving as the unit of analysis and observation.

A sample of 339 nurses was determined using Yamane's (1967) formula, based on a 5% margin of error. Stratified random sampling was applied to ensure representation across the six hospitals, with the sample allocated proportionately according to each hospital's nursing population. Simple random sampling was then used to select individual nurses within each stratum. Primary data were collected using a semi-structured questionnaire comprising closed-ended and open-ended questions. For this article, the relevant questionnaire sections focused on career development opportunities, work environment and overall nurse retention.

The questionnaire was pilot-tested using 34 respondents, representing approximately 10% of the calculated sample size. The pilot study was conducted in a public hospital in Nairobi City County that was not included among the six study sites. Content validity was assessed through review by academic supervisors with expertise in human resource management and public healthcare systems. Internal consistency reliability was evaluated using Cronbach's Alpha, with a threshold of 0.70 adopted based on Nunnally (1978). The study obtained the necessary approvals from the National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI), relevant hospital ethics committees and Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture

and Technology (JKUAT). Informed consent was obtained from respondents, and confidentiality and secure data storage were maintained throughout the study.

Data were analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics, including means, standard deviations and frequency distributions, were used to summarise the responses, while inferential statistics and regression analysis were applied to examine the effects of career development and work environment strategies on nurse retention. The qualitative responses from open-ended questions were analysed thematically to identify recurring patterns and provide further insights into the quantitative findings. Before regression analysis, diagnostic tests were conducted to assess linearity, normality, multicollinearity and homoscedasticity. The Shapiro–Wilk test was used to assess the normality of residuals, while Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) and tolerance values were used to examine multicollinearity. Scatterplots of standardised residuals against predicted values were used to assess linearity and homoscedasticity.

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The study was conducted on a sample of 339 nurses in public hospitals of the city of Nairobi in the City County of Nairobi. The size of the sample was determined from a target population of 2220 nurses in the six selected public hospitals using the Yamane's formula as presented in chapter Three, with margin of error of 5%. 339 questionnaires were distributed, 263 completed and returned and 76 were not returned. This yielded a 77.6% response rate.

Descriptive Analysis

The study assessed career development strategy, work environment strategy and nurse retention using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Mean scores of 2.61–3.40 indicate a neutral response, while scores of 3.41–4.20 indicate agreement. Standard deviations (SD) indicate the variation in respondents' perceptions.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for Career Development Strategy

Career Development Strategy	Mean	SD	Interpretation
There are clear policies for professional advancement.	3.44	1.492	Agree
I have adequate access to continuous professional development programmes.	3.54	1.403	Agree
Promotion is based on merit and performance.	3.27	1.466	Neutral
I am encouraged to pursue further education or specialisation.	3.31	1.439	Neutral
Career growth opportunities are equally available to all nurses.	3.19	1.448	Neutral
There is a clear mentorship or coaching system in this hospital.	3.31	1.470	Neutral
Overall Career Development Strategy	**3.34**	**—**	**Neutral**

Source: Research Data (2026).

The overall mean of 3.34 indicates that career development opportunities were moderately established, although respondents expressed mixed perceptions. Access to continuous professional development programmes recorded the highest mean (M = 3.54, SD = 1.403), followed by clear professional advancement policies (M = 3.44, SD = 1.492). However, respondents were neutral regarding equal access to career growth opportunities (M = 3.19), merit-based promotion (M = 3.27), further education and specialisation (M = 3.31), and mentorship (M = 3.31).

These findings suggest that access to professional development programmes does not necessarily translate into equitable career progression or structured mentorship. The results are consistent with Msacky (2024), who identified limited training and promotion opportunities as factors contributing to healthcare worker attrition in Tanzania. They also support Poku et al.

(2025), who associated inadequate professional development support with nurses' turnover intentions. Similarly, Bradacs et al. (2025) established that continuous learning and leadership opportunities were associated with higher staff retention. The findings therefore point to the importance of strengthening transparent promotion pathways, equal access to advancement, mentorship and support for further specialisation.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics for Work Environment Strategy

Work Environment Strategy	Mean	SD	Interpretation
The hospital provides a safe and healthy work environment.	3.53	1.370	Agree
I have access to the tools and resources I need to do my job.	3.52	1.324	Agree
My workload is manageable under normal working conditions.	3.49	1.417	Agree
Communication between staff and leadership is open and respectful.	3.46	1.324	Agree
I feel valued and recognised for my contributions.	3.54	1.289	Agree
Teamwork and collaboration are encouraged in my department.	3.69	1.390	Agree
Overall Work Environment Strategy	**3.54**	**—**	**Agree**

Source: Research Data (2026).

The overall mean of 3.54 indicates that respondents generally perceived the work environment positively. Teamwork and collaboration recorded the highest mean (M = 3.69, SD = 1.390), followed by recognition of nurses' contributions (M = 3.54, SD = 1.289). Safe working conditions (M = 3.53) and access to work resources (M = 3.52) were also positively rated. However, communication between staff and leadership recorded the lowest mean (M = 3.46), while workload manageability had a mean of 3.49.

The findings suggest that although the work environment was generally favourable, there is scope to improve management communication, workload distribution and institutional support. This is consistent with Deonarain (2024), who identified workplace conditions, inadequate resources and communication as important factors affecting healthcare workers' experiences and intentions to leave. The findings also correspond with Kgapele and Thusi (2025), who highlighted the importance of supportive management, feedback and collaboration in reducing staff turnover. Overall, the results reinforce the importance of supportive working relationships, adequate resources, manageable workloads and recognition in creating an environment conducive to nurse retention.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics for Retention of Nurses

Retention of Nurses	Mean	SD	Interpretation
I am satisfied working in this hospital.	3.62	1.334	Agree
I rarely think about leaving this hospital.	3.30	1.402	Neutral
I see myself working here three years from now.	3.46	1.361	Agree
Management demonstrates commitment to retaining employees in this hospital.	3.56	1.329	Agree
I believe there are good long-term prospects for me here.	3.28	1.372	Neutral
My department or supervisors actively encourage me to remain in this hospital.	3.48	1.397	Agree
Overall Retention of Nurses	**3.45**	**—**	**Agree**

Source: Research Data (2026).

The overall mean of 3.45 indicates that nurse retention was generally perceived positively. Job satisfaction recorded the highest mean (M = 3.62, SD = 1.334), followed by perceived management commitment to retention (M = 3.56, SD = 1.329). Respondents also agreed that they expected to remain in their hospitals for the next three years (M = 3.46) and received supervisory encouragement to stay (M = 3.48). However, neutral responses regarding thoughts of leaving (M = 3.30) and long-term career prospects (M = 3.28) indicate uncertainty about continued employment.

These findings suggest that current job satisfaction does not necessarily translate into strong long-term retention intentions. The results are consistent with Karemu et al. (2022), who identified career development, training and workplace climate as important talent management factors influencing employee retention at Kenyatta National Hospital. They also align with Bradacs et al. (2025), who highlighted the importance of continuous learning and leadership opportunities in retaining healthcare workers. The findings reinforce the need for public hospitals to strengthen career progression opportunities and maintain supportive working environments to improve nurses' willingness to remain in service.

Correlation Analysis

Pearson correlation analysis was used to establish the direction and strength of the relationships between career development strategy, work environment strategy and nurse retention. The results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Correlation Analysis

Variables	Nurse Retention	Career Development	Work Environment
Nurse Retention	1		
Career Development	.593**	1	
Work Environment	.725**	.366**	1
N	**263**	**263**	**263**

*Note: ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).*

Source: Research Data (2026).

The results indicate a positive and statistically significant relationship between career development strategy and nurse retention ($r = .593$, $p < .001$). This suggests that nurses who reported better opportunities for professional development were also more likely to report higher retention. The finding is consistent with Morison (2023), who established that inadequate mentorship, promotion prospects and specialist training contributed to healthcare worker attrition in Sierra Leone. It also supports Poku et al. (2025), who associated limited professional development support with nurses' turnover intentions.

Work environment strategy had a stronger positive and statistically significant relationship with nurse retention ($r = .725$, $p < .001$). This indicates that more favourable working conditions were associated with higher reported nurse retention. The finding is consistent with Muthuri, Senkubuge and Hongoro (2020), who identified supervision, teamwork, workload and facility conditions as factors influencing healthcare worker retention in Kenya. It also corresponds with Deonarain (2024), who found that inadequate supplies, overcrowding and poor administrative communication contributed to healthcare workers' exhaustion and intentions to leave in South Africa.

The correlation between career development and work environment strategies was also positive and statistically significant ($r = .366$, $p < .001$). Overall, work environment had the stronger association with nurse retention, followed by career development. However, correlation does

not establish causation, hence regression analysis was used to examine the contribution of the two strategies.

Regression Analysis

Regression coefficients were analyzed to identify the unique contribution career development strategy, and work environment strategy, to the retention of nurses. The results are given in Table 5.

Table 5: Regression Coefficients

Predictor	B	Std. Error	Beta (β)	t	Sig.
(Constant)	0.315	0.154	—	2.045	.042
Career Development Strategy	0.207	0.043	.250	4.814	<.001
Work Environment Strategy	0.418	0.045	.510	9.289	<.001

Source: Research Data (2026)

The Career development strategy (B = 0.207, p < .001) positively and significantly affected retention of a nurse. This means that when there was a one-unit increase in career development strategy, the retention of nurses increased by 0.207 units, while assuming that the other factors—recruitment, compensation, and work environment—remained unchanged. This corroborates the findings of Akerele (2025) who noted that structured professional growth and advancement are strategies that can support healthcare professionals' retention. Additionally, it supports Morison (2023) in the importance of planning and ongoing development of their professional future to support the health professionals' retention in organizations. Thus, career development is found to play a significant role in nurses' retention, independent of other factors.

Results showed that strategies to improve the work environment had a positive and statistically significant impact on nurse retention (B = 0.418, p < .001). This suggests that, if all of the other variables (recruitment, compensation and career development) remain constant, a one-unit change in work environment strategy corresponds to a 0.418-unit change in retention of nurses. This aligns with Koloba & Mpanza (2022) who researched on the organisational and working conditions within healthcare settings. The implication is that nurses' working conditions are an important factor in their retention.

The estimated regression model was therefore:

$$\mathbf{Y = 0.315 + 0.207X_1 + 0.418X_2 + \varepsilon}$$

Where Y represents retention of nurses; X_1 represents career development strategy; X_2 represents work environment strategy.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

The study found that there is a positive and a significant impact of career development strategy on retention of nurses in public hospitals in Nairobi City County. Nurses were more aware of the existence of professional advancement policies and continuing professional development (CPD) opportunities, but less positive views were expressed about merit-based promotion, equal access to career progression, further training and specialization and mentorship and coaching. Thus, the study can be concluded that clear and fair career progression and access to professional development and mentorship can help in sustaining nurses at public hospitals.

Based on the study, the conclusions are that work environment strategy positively and significantly influences retention of nurses in public hospitals in Nairobi City County. Nurses had a favourable attitude towards their work place in general, especially in terms of safety, work resources, communication, recognition and teamwork. Qualitative findings however,

suggested a need for adequate staffing, manageable workloads, adequate equipment and supplies, communication and staff participation. The study thus concludes that the factors of a supportive, well-resourced and collaborative work environment are important to motivate nurses to stay in public hospitals.

Recommendations

There needs to be a better focus on career progression at public hospitals, through the development of clear career pathways, equitable and merit-based promotion systems and more access to professional training, CPD or further study and specialization. The need to develop mentoring and coaching in the management system must be strengthened and nurses should have access to career pathways throughout the departments. The changes would provide nurses with better career advancement opportunities in the public hospital system.

The working condition of public hospitals should be improved by resolving issues of staff shortages, work pressure, equipment and supplies. Hospital management should also share information and feedback among staff and management, encourage teamwork and collaboration among staff, acknowledge nurses' contribution and give opportunities for involvement of nurses in decision making that affects their work. Creating an environment that would be conducive and provide adequate resources to nurses who were performing their job would help alleviate some of their concerns and increase their willingness to remain in the hospital.

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