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FACTORS INFLUENCING EMPLOYEE RETENTION AMONG LECTURERS IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

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Abstract:

Employee turnover among lecturers in Malaysia is a significant issue that can result in a loss of talent and experience, decreased productivity, and increased costs for recruitment and training of new staff. The literature suggests that low salaries and benefits and a lack of career growth opportunities are the main reasons for high employee turnover among lecturers in Malaysia. These factors can lead to a lack of job satisfaction, and motivation, and a feeling of career stagnation, resulting in many lecturers intending to leave their current institutions. This paper aims to present a conceptual paper on the factors influencing employee retention among lecturers in Malaysia. The study draws on various sources, including academic studies and surveys, to identify the main factors contributing to employee turnover and the costs associated with it. This paper also provides insights into the challenges faced by universities in retaining their lecturers and the need to implement strategies to improve retention. The study highlights the importance of addressing the issues of low salaries and benefits and the lack of career growth opportunities to improve lecturer retention in Malaysia. The study suggests that universities need to develop retention strategies that offer competitive salaries, benefits, and opportunities for career growth to retain their lecturers. By doing so, universities can reduce the costs associated with employee turnover and ensure that they have experienced and talented lecturers to deliver high-quality education and research.

Keywords:

Employee Retention; Compensation; Promotional Opportunities; Higher Education Institutions; Social Exchange Theory

Introduction

Academic staff turnover has become a major concern around the world. According to information extracted from LinkedIn data, it becomes evident that the education sector

experienced an 11.2% turnover rate in the year 2017, making it one of the industries grappling with a considerably high turnover rate (Petrone, 2018). Additional statistics from XpertHR provide insight into the average turnover rates in the UK for the year 2017. Specifically, the academic staff turnover rate is recorded at 11.5%, while the turnover rate for non-academic staff stands at 10.2%. This highlights a nearly identical turnover rate between academic and non-academic staff, differing only by a margin of 1.3% (Wortley, 2018). In the context of Asia, the retention of administrative staff hinges on the presence of organizational support, as this criterion serves as an incentive to sustain their commitment to their roles. Moreover, enhancements in incentives have the potential to elevate the overall job satisfaction levels of administrative personnel (Thung, 2021).

Meanwhile, the high turnover of lecturers in Malaysia's higher education institutions has become a major concern. According to Paul and Kee (2020), there has been a significant turnover of academic staff in Malaysia's educational system. Academic staff turnover remains a problem in Malaysia's education sector, as evidenced by the fact that the average annual turnover rate increased from 13.2% in 2013 to 20% in 2017 (Falahat et al., 2019). Furthermore, the number of academic employees leaving Malaysian universities has grown over time, resulting in a labor shortage in many areas (Nguyen et al., 2020). Moreover, Malaysian private universities have significantly higher turnover rates than public universities (GuiXia and Rashid, 2019). Thus, Orpina et al. (2022) also cited in their study that "each year, more than 26% of academic staff at private universities leave, compared to 11% at public universities".

According to Sinniah et al. (2019), academic staff members at universities and colleges are currently more likely to pursue new job opportunities than to stay in their current roles. These were due to it being related to job satisfaction. Hence, the job satisfaction of lecturers is influenced by a number of variables, such as pay, opportunities for advancement, the workplace, and recognition (Sinniah et al., 2019). For instance, the average salary for a lecturer is RM 3,325 per month in Malaysia meanwhile the average salary for a lecturer in Singapore is \$5,467 (RM18,781) per month (Indeed, 2023). Hence, the statistic was aligned with the finding of (Masum et al., 2015) who found that The National University of Singapore offers a significantly higher salary package than the University of Malaya (UM). In other words, academic staff in Malaysia are unlikely to be able to meet their salary expectations. Lower wages lead to lower job satisfaction, whereas higher wages lead to higher job satisfaction (Basak and Govender, 2015).

A survey conducted by The Chronicle of Higher Education revealed that 50% of academic staff reported a decline in their teaching enjoyment over the course of the year during the pandemic period necessitating the shift to online teaching (Din et al., 2023). This decline was attributed to concerns about reduced salaries, job security, increased workload, and the pressures stemming from remote work arrangements (Din et al., 2023). In a parallel vein, a separate article shared a similar perspective, indicating that approximately 35% of Higher Education Institutions (HEI) were grappling with employee turnover, and over 55% of these institutions were confronted with the challenge of academic staff members contemplating early retirement. Moreover, the article highlighted that a substantial 70% of the overall academic staff had experienced heightened stress due to their heavy workloads over the preceding year (Umpierrez, 2021). These circumstances collectively underscore the imperative for the global higher education sector to enhance employees' job satisfaction; failure to do so could place significant strain on the sector (Din et al., 2023).

However, Khan et al., (2010) contend that lecturers' high turnover rate is primarily due to their dissatisfaction. The main causes of this dissatisfaction are worries about “job security, supervisor support, compensation satisfaction, job autonomy, KPI attainability, and overall job satisfaction”. Due to this reason, the quality of education has suffered as a result of the lecturers' performance deteriorating (Rathakrishnan et al., 2016). Despite the fact that this issue has been studied by many researchers, the problem remained, indicating that it has not been resolved. As a result, Malaysian universities must address the causes of lecturer turnover and implement retention strategies. The primary goal of this research is to review existing literature and investigate the factors influencing employee retention among lecturers in Malaysian higher education institutions.

Literature Review

Employee retention is “the process of encouraging employees to stay with the organization for a longer period of time or until a project is completed. Retention strategies seek to improve employee commitment, communication, and support for key corporate initiatives” (Kaur, 2017). Employee retention is regarded as a critical factor for organizations seeking to gain a competitive advantage in today's market (Walker, 2001). Many organizations, however, face difficulties in retaining their employees, and it is critical to retain competent staff because replacing them incurs additional costs such as training and filling vacancies (Ghansah, 2011). Employee retention has been emphasized by numerous scholars (Bibi et al., 2019). Moreover, Khatun et al., (2023) mentioned in their study, “choosing the right person for the job is a practice of employee retention that ensures an employee will stay with the company for a long time.”

Employees are valued intellectual assets in knowledge-intensive industries and attracting and retaining them is critical (Joo et al., 2015). However, voluntary employee turnover has a negative impact on organizational success. To retain employees for a longer period of time, it is necessary to analyze the factors that contribute to their intention to quit. Traditional approaches to turnover and retention in human resource management have focused primarily on individual-level predictors such as job stress, unequal treatment, inadequate pay, and alternate job opportunities (Hom et al., 2017). Additionally, other elements, like employee social networks and organizational networks, also have a big impact on the decisions about turnover. According to several studies (Gao et al., 2019; Younis et al., 2023), organizational network structural characteristics such as network density, group cohesiveness, and network centrality are thought to affect employees' intent to leave their jobs.

Next, according to a study conducted by (Alshamrani et al., 2023), it was demonstrated that there exists a positive correlation between employee retention and six key factors. These factors encompass pay and benefits, working environment, relationships with colleagues, corporate culture, employee motivation, and leadership within the organization. Separate research led by (Dhanpat et al., 2018) indicated that there is a connection between retention factors and the intention to leave among call center agents. Particularly, the study found that compensation plays the most significant role in employees' desire to leave. Johennesse and Chou (2017) oversaw a study that revealed critical human resource policies affecting employee retention in Taiwanese companies. These encompass job design, performance evaluation, accountability and responsibility, fair compensation, and business coaching programs.

Additionally, according to the research done (Rakhra, 2018), many employees believe their employers are not doing enough to keep them, and if this trend continues, they plan to change

jobs. The study also discussed possible causes for leaving a job, including dissatisfaction with one's current position or relationships with coworkers, issues with the working environment, a lack of opportunities for professional advancement, and dissatisfaction with pay, among others. Next, a study led by (Chatzoudes & Chatzoglou, 2022) introduced a conceptual framework proposing several factors influencing employee retention, including job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and work-life balance. Meanwhile, Magaisa and Musundire, (2021) mentioned that variables such as job satisfaction, cultural aspects, work-life balance, remuneration, management training and development, innovation, communication, rewards, recognition, and succession planning all contribute to employee retention.

However, in the context of higher education institutions, several factors were identified as important for retaining lecturers and reducing turnover in higher education institutions in a study conducted by (Sinniah et al., 2019), including salary, work environment, recognition, promotion, and job satisfaction. Meanwhile, Rathakrishnan et al (2016) identified key factors for employee retention as job security, supervisor support, compensation satisfaction, job autonomy, KPI achievability, and job satisfaction. Furthermore, Ahmed and Kolachi (2013) suggested “four factors that affect employee retention or turnover: organizational career opportunities, mentoring programs, organizational communication policies, and salary and benefits”. Moreover, job stress, challenging work, and job satisfaction all have an impact on employee absence and turnover, while challenging work has also been shown to have an impact on employees' intentions to remain or leave an organization (Ibrahim et al., 2019).

Moreover, employee decisions to leave are also influenced by factors like changes in management style, conflicts with coworkers, and a lack of trust (Reina et al., 2018; Kerdpitak and Jermisittiparsert, 2020; Azam et al., 2019; Brinck and Larsson, 2019). Leaders and managers also have an impact on employee turnover or retention. Additionally, reduced employee enthusiasm and job dissatisfaction can result from poor leadership (Reina et al., 2018; Al-Suraihi et al., 2021). According to Al-Suraihi et al. (2021) research, people quit their jobs for a variety of reasons, including job stress, job satisfaction, job security, work environment, motivation, wages, and rewards.

Table 1: Factors to Encourage Retention among Lecturers

Authors (Years)	Factors
Ahmed & Kolachi (2013)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Career opportunities • Mentoring programs • Organizational communication policies • Salary and benefits
Dai (2014)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Executive compensation
Thanasirisate et al (2015)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compensation and welfare being • Employee support and relationships • Working environment • Career opportunity

Rathakrishnan, Imm & Kok (2016)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Job security • Supervisor support • Compensation satisfaction • Job autonomy • KPI achievability • Job satisfaction
Hom et. al. (2017)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Job Stress • Unequal treatment • Inadequate pay • Alternate job opportunities • Employee social network • Organization network
Johennesse & Chou (2017)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Job design • Performance assessment • Accountability and responsibility • Equity of compensation • Business coaching
Bibi et al. (2017)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compensation • Promotional opportunities • Work environment
Reina et al. (2018)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changes in management style • Conflict with coworkers • Lack of trust
Dhanpat et al., (2018)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compensation • Job satisfaction, • Training and development opportunities, • Work-life balance • Management support
Rakhra (2018)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dissatisfaction with the current job • Relationship with colleagues • Working environment • Growth opportunities • Salary
Ibbrahim , Melhem & Ali (2019)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Challenging work
Sinniah et al. (2019)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Salary • Work environment • Recognition • Promotion • Job Satisfaction
Singh (2019)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership style

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decision-making ability • Career advancement opportunities • Flexible working arrangements • Competitive compensation
Maru & Omodu (2020)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monetary benefits • Non-monetary benefits
Al-Suraihi et al (2021)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Job stress • Job satisfaction • Job security • Work environment • Motivation • Wages • Rewards
Thung (2021)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Job satisfaction • Perceived organizational support • Job stress
Magaisa & Musundire (2021)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Job satisfaction • Culture • Work-life balance • Remuneration management • Training & development • Innovation • Communication • Rewards • Recognition • Succession planning
Chatzoudes & Chatzoglou (2022)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Job satisfaction • Organizational commitment • Work-life balance
Obazea & Samikon (2022)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Career development • Compensation • Engagement
Younis, Ahsan & Chatteur (2023)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Network density • Group cohesiveness • Network centrality
Alshamrani et al. (2023)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pay or benefits • Working environment • Coworker connections • Corporate culture • Employee motivation • Leadership

- | | |
|-------------------------|---|
| Khatun et al.
(2023) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development opportunities • Compensation |
|-------------------------|---|

Source: (Author's Compilation)

Factors to Encourage Lecturer's Retention

Based on the literature review mentioned above, various factors have been identified that can contribute to encouraging the retention of lecturers. These factors include rewards, training, working conditions, recognition, promotion, job security, supervisor support, job autonomy, KPI achievability, and job satisfaction. However, according to Table 1, compensation (pay, salary, benefits, or rewards) has been mentioned 17 times meanwhile promotional opportunities (career advancement, career opportunities, or promotion) have been mentioned 10 times indicating these factors were the highest and second highest that was widely studied for past researches. Hence, this study will primarily focus on compensation and promotional opportunities as predictors of lecturer retention in higher education institutions. This was due to previous research indicating a strong connection between promotional opportunities, compensation, and employee retention within higher education institutions. Therefore, it is intriguing to delve deeper into the examination of compensation and promotional opportunities and their impact on lecturer retention.

Compensation

Compensation refers to the salary, benefits, or other benefits that an organization provides to its employees. The higher the pay, the higher the retention rate, and the lower the pay, the higher the turnover rate. Employees seek non-monetary compensation in addition to monetary compensation, such as development opportunities, promotion opportunities, job challenges, rewards, recognition, and a flexible work environment (Son, 2015). The importance of compensation as a factor in employee retention is widely acknowledged in the literature. According to Tessema and Soeters (2006), compensation in the current study is the monthly salary participants receive from organizations. According to studies on compensation (Ichniowski, Shaw, and Prennushi, 1997), it improves retention and lowers absenteeism. Similarly to this, Harris and Brannick (1999) emphasized that paying employees well is essential to keeping them on board for a long time. Pay, as a part of compensation, has a big impact on luring and keeping employees (Williams & Dreher, 1992).

In addition, March and Simon (1958) suggested that “businesses with insufficient compensation are more likely to have high employee turnover”. In earlier studies, the effect of pay on employee retention has been investigated (Hinkin & Tracey, 2010). For instance, Irshad (2000) investigated the impact of pay on employee retention in his study, and the results showed a strong correlation between the two. In a similar vein, Bibi et al. (2017) discovered a significant correlation between pay and staff retention in their investigation. Furthermore, according to previous researchers, there is a strong correlation between pay and employee retention (Bibi et al., 2017). Hence, “compensation plays a vital role in attracting and retaining lecturers in higher education institutions. With the increasing number of universities, dissatisfied lecturers are willing to switch to institutions that offer higher compensation packages. Lecturers tend to experience dissatisfaction when they perceive their compensation to be unfair, and this lack of equity in compensation satisfaction can lead to an increase in turnover intention among lecturers” (Rathakrishnan et al, 2016).

Moreover, several studies have demonstrated a negative impact on job satisfaction when employees receive low salaries, whereas high salaries have been shown to have a positive effect on job satisfaction (Basak and Govender, 2015). The level of job satisfaction related to salary directly influences employee performance, job involvement, motivation, and overall job satisfaction (Masum et al, 2015). In other words, organizations must fulfill employees' salary satisfaction to enhance their job satisfaction levels. Salisu et al (2015) found a positive relationship between salary and job satisfaction across various work domains. Next, Sinniah et al. (2017) conducted an experiment demonstrating that successful levels of pay satisfaction contribute to organizational success. This is because salary serves as a motivating factor for employees to give their best efforts and contribute to the organization. In summary, satisfied employees tend to work more efficiently and effectively (Sinniah et al., 2017).

Besides, Obazea and Samikon (2022) demonstrated that career advancement, pay, and engagement have a favorable and significant impact on employee retention among entry-level employees in Nigerian commercial banks. This human resource management strategy is crucial for keeping employees in the Nigerian banking sector, according to the study. Development opportunities and pay were both significantly correlated with employee retention, according to research by (Khatun et al., 2023). However, multiple regression analysis showed that in terms of keeping employees, compensation ranked higher than career opportunities. Furthermore, it was discovered that for organizational goals to be easily attained, managers needed to project various levels of perceived compensation plans. This entails providing competitive pay based on job duties as well as additional benefits like bonuses or promotions based on performance assessments. Overall, this study showed how crucial it is for businesses to provide employees with growth opportunities and competitive salary packages if they want to retain their loyalty over time.

Promotional Opportunities

Delery and Doty (1996) defined promotional opportunities as “both the availability of staff members' ability to move up the corporate ladder and the openness of an institution's policies”. Meanwhile, promotional opportunities, in accordance with Accenture (2001), “increase employee retention by fostering their loyalty, satisfaction, and decreased intention to leave”. In the past, Miller and Wheeler (1992) highlighted how employees' decisions to stay with the organization are influenced by the availability of promotion opportunities. According to the social exchange theory (Blau, 1964), wherein promotion is viewed as an organizational honor, “leading employees to reciprocate with loyalty, commitment, and involvement, the presence of promotional opportunities instills a sense of value in employees”. A survey-based empirical study on retention intentions by Morris and Quarles (2004) showed a strong positive correlation between retention intentions and promotional opportunities. Similar to this, earlier studies by Teseema and Soeters (2006) discovered a significant relationship between employee performance and promotion opportunities. On the other hand, Billah (2009) also discovered a significant correlation between promotion opportunities and employee retention. Thus, this finding was corroborated by other previous researchers (Bibi et al., 2017).

The importance of promotion to job satisfaction was emphasized by Porter et al., (1974). Moreover, Alam (2015) stated that “giving employees the chance to advance has a positive effect on their performance and decreases their intention to quit”. This leads to greater loyalty to the companies where they work. Additionally, promotion affects job satisfaction, according to Khamisa et al. (2015) and it was found that a significant correlation existed between promotion and job satisfaction using the correlation coefficient method (Pan et al., 2015),

which suggests that employees would be happier in their jobs if given the chance to advance. Moreover, Lai and Chen (2012) also found sufficient data to support this idea, proving that job satisfaction can rise with promotion. According to Sinniah et al. (2018), when employees are not promoted, they may find it difficult to meet their personal needs, which may hinder their ability to adapt to the workplace. As a result, job satisfaction declines when there is no promotion (Sinniah et al., 2019). Therefore, as stated by Accenture (2001), "promotion opportunities help to foster employee loyalty, satisfaction, and reduce their intention to leave, thereby enhancing retention". Moreover, the investigation by (Khatun et al., 2023) confirmed that development opportunities were significantly correlated with employee retention.

Social Exchange Theory

According to Rathakrishnan et al (2016), several theories can be applied to the study of employee retention and attrition, including Social Exchange Theory, Perceived Organizational Support Theory (POS), Reciprocity Theory, Equity Theory, Expectancy Theory, and Herzberg Two Factor Theory. However, the focus of this study was exclusively on Social Exchange Theory. Thibaut and Kelley's Social Exchange Theory (SET), which serves as the theoretical foundation of the current study, was first developed in 1959. To better understand the dynamics of the employer-employee relationship, SET has been used in research on turnover and retention more frequently (Coyle-Shapiro & Conway, 2005). According to SET, good deeds and performances should be reciprocated (Blau, 1964). According to Mossholder et al (2005), people who perceive benefits from others feel obligated to repay those benefits through commendable actions, attitudes, endeavors, and dedication.

Blau (1964) also draws attention to the fact that organizations use various HRM strategies, such as pay and advancement opportunities, to create unique exchange relationships. Additionally, SET stresses that workers perform better when they feel appreciated and supported by their employers (Eisenberger et al., 2001; Bibi et al., 2017). Moreover, SET also explained that the relationships are formed by the balance of benefits and costs to an individual (Eugene and Nor, 2011). Simply put, the strength and commitment of a relationship are determined by the perceived balance between the effort expended (costs) and the rewards obtained (benefits). Employees can establish social exchange relationships with their supervisors or organizations, according to Masterson, Lewis, Goldman, and Taylor (2000). Moreover, employees, are more likely to contribute to the organization if they are satisfied with it (Rathakrishnan et al., 2016).

Methodology

To accomplish the aforementioned goals, an archival method was used to review the literature. Using the keywords "employee retention," "employee turnover," "compensation," "promotion opportunities," and "higher education institutions" in the online databases Google Scholar and Scopus, it was possible to gain insights into the current state of this study by compiling the research of various researchers. To accomplish the stated goal, articles on employee retention that were published between 2016 and 2023 have been examined.

Discussion and Conclusion

This study emphasized high turnover rates among academic staff. In this study, it was also highlighted that Malaysian private universities have significantly higher turnover rates than public universities (GuiXia and Rashid, 2019; Orpina et al., 2022). These could be due to a few factors that were discovered and had an impact on lecturer retention in higher education institutions. Hence, using the archival method and past studies mentioned above, it can be

inferred that pay and opportunities for advancement had an impact on employee retention. Previous studies have demonstrated that compensation is a crucial element in luring and keeping employees, as they are more likely to feel satisfied and motivated to stay with the company when they believe they are being fairly compensated for their work. In addition, fair pay and a positive workplace culture can help recruit, foster, and keep qualified and experienced lecturers. Hence, compensation is an important factor that affects employee retention. Lecturers who are paid a fair and competitive salary are more likely to stay with their current institution. This is because compensation is an indicator of the value that an institution places on its employees. A fair salary can also help to reduce financial stress and improve job satisfaction. This, in turn, can lead to increased productivity and a more positive work environment.

For instance, Sorn et al. (2023) mentioned in their study that one of the most crucial factors affecting employee retention is compensation. Employees are more likely to quit their jobs if they are dissatisfied with their pay. Therefore, to address this, businesses should conduct regular surveys to ensure that their compensation packages remain competitive in the market and that their employee benefit plans are in line with the needs of their workforce. Employers must understand that compensation is not a one-size-fits-all approach to employee retention. Employers must modify their compensation plans to account for the fact that different employees have different priorities and needs. Employers should work to foster a culture of openness and transparency around pay so that workers can understand how their pay stacks up against industry averages and the organization's overall compensation strategy.

Next, promotional opportunities are also important for retaining employees. Lecturers are more likely to stay if they are given opportunities to advance their careers within their current institution. This is due to the fact that promotions provide a sense of career progression and development. It also demonstrates that a company values its employees and is willing to invest in their future. Career development is a crucial factor in employee retention, which creates attention to the job in the organization. On the one hand, training and career opportunities have a direct effect on employee retention (Yuan et al., 2022). A previous study, as cited in (Rahaman et al., 2023), also suggests that career development opportunities directly affect employee retention, with a strong positive association between them. Employees place a high value on long-term career development, and career opportunities have a significant impact on employee loyalty and retention within the organization (Rahaman et al., 2023).

In conclusion, compensation and promotional opportunities play crucial roles in influencing the retention of lecturers. Ensuring fair and competitive compensation can alleviate financial stress and enhance job satisfaction, resulting in increased productivity and a more positive work environment. Similarly, providing avenues for career advancement through promotional opportunities can instill a sense of growth and demonstrate an institution's commitment to employee development. Failing to offer these incentives can contribute to a high turnover rate among lecturers, negatively affecting the quality of education provided. Consequently, it is imperative for higher educational institutions to prioritize competitive compensation packages and promotional pathways in order to retain experienced and knowledgeable lecturers. Therefore, further empirical studies are recommended in the context of higher education institutions in Malaysia to explore the impact of these factors on lecturer retention. Additionally, future research should explore other relevant theories and incorporate additional variables to strengthen the findings and reduce the research gap.

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