INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF
EDUCATION, PSYCHOLOGY
AND COUNSELLING
(IJEPC)<https://gaexcellence.com/ijepe>HERZBERG'S MOTIVATION-HYGIENE FACTORS AND
EMPLOYEE RETENTION IN PRIVATE HIGHER
EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN KOTA KINABALU,
SABAH: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORKFaridah Mohd Shah^{1*}, Imelda Albert Gisip², Muzalifah Monil³, Suali@Suhailie Bakrin⁴¹Faculty of Business and Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Sabah Branch, Malaysia farida7572@uitm.edu.my <https://orcid.org/0009-0007-9337-1589>²Faculty of Business and Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Sabah Branch, Malaysia imeldag@uitm.edu.my <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9304-2933>³Faculty of Business and Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Melaka Branch, Malaysia muzalifah@uitm.edu.my <https://orcid.org/0009-0008-3144-3062>⁴Faculty of Business and Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Sabah Branch, Malaysia suali7548@uitm.edu.my <https://orcid.org/0009-0003-0423-0372>

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Article Info:**Article history:**

Received date: 23.07.2026

Revised date: 03.08.2026

Accepted date: 27.08.2026

Published date: 14.09.2026

To cite this document:

Shah, F. M., Gisip, I. A., Monil, M., & Bakrin, S. S. (2026). Herzberg's Motivation-Hygiene Factors and Employee Retention in Private Higher Education Institutions in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah: A Conceptual Framework. *International Journal of Education, Psychology and Counselling*, 11(64), 701-715.

Abstract:

Employee retention among lecturers remains a persistent concern in Malaysia's private higher education sector, particularly in Sabah, where talent mobility, resource constraints, and a comparatively small academic labour market may intensify staffing challenges. Despite extensive research on employee turnover, limited evidence explains why lecturers remain in private higher education institutions (PHEIs) in Sabah using Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory. This conceptual paper proposes a framework in which motivator factors (recognition, job autonomy, nature of work, and career advancement) and hygiene factors (salary, workload, interpersonal relationships, and job security) influence employee retention through lecturers' job satisfaction as a mediating variable. The proposed study will adopt a quantitative, cross-sectional design involving full-time lecturers employed in registered PHEIs in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah. Respondents will be selected using purposive sampling, with the required sample size to be determined through an a priori statistical power analysis. Data will be collected using a structured questionnaire and analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics and Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) in SmartPLS. The study hypothesises that motivator and hygiene factors influence lecturers' job satisfaction, which subsequently mediates their relationship with employee retention. The proposed

framework is expected to extend the contextual application of Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory by testing its explanatory relevance to lecturer retention in an underexplored East Malaysian private higher education setting and to inform evidence-based retention practices.

DOI: 10.35631/IJEPC.1164034

Keyword:

Employee Retention; Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory; Job Satisfaction; Private Higher Education Institutions; Sabah; Lecturers



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Introduction

Retaining qualified lecturers is a persistent challenge for private higher education institutions (PHEIs) in Malaysia because academic continuity, teaching quality, research productivity, and student development depend heavily on a stable academic workforce. Lecturer departures can disrupt teaching, increase recruitment and training costs, weaken organisational performance, and affect the quality of higher education (Alam & Asim, 2019; Orpina et al., 2022).

The challenge is especially relevant as employee expectations increasingly extend beyond remuneration to career development, supportive leadership, meaningful work, and work-life balance (Randstad Malaysia, 2025a, 2025b). For PHEIs, these expectations intersect with substantial teaching, research, administrative, and institutional performance demands. In Sabah, the issue warrants particular attention because talent mobility, resource constraints, and a smaller academic labour market may make the attraction and retention of qualified lecturers more difficult.

Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory offers a relevant lens for examining this issue because it distinguishes motivator factors that foster job satisfaction from hygiene factors that reduce dissatisfaction (Herzberg et al., 1959). Applying the theory in Sabah's private higher education context is important because it enables the proposed study to assess whether intrinsic and extrinsic workplace conditions remain useful for explaining lecturers' job satisfaction and intention to stay in a contemporary, underexplored East Malaysian setting. Accordingly, the conceptual model proposes the pathway:

Motivator Factors + Hygiene Factors → Job Satisfaction → Employee Retention, with job satisfaction explicitly positioned as the mediating variable.

Problem Statement

Employee retention has become one of the most significant human resource challenges confronting higher education institutions worldwide. As universities compete for highly qualified academic talent, retaining experienced lecturers has become increasingly difficult due to changing workforce expectations, increasing workloads, career mobility, and evolving organisational demands. Persistent lecturer turnover disrupts teaching continuity, weakens research productivity, increases recruitment and training costs, and ultimately threatens institutional sustainability and educational quality (Alam & Asim, 2019; Orpina et al., 2022).

Inside the nation of Malaysia, organizations face these exact same difficulties while operating in a very competitive job environment. Many people believe that employee retention depends not on payment alone, because workers also seek career growth, helpful leaders, meaningful work, and personal life balance. Data from Randstad Malaysia (2025a) shows that 57% of Malaysian workers consider departing from their working position if managers fail to help their professional growth, while 55% state they would resign if leaders showed no concern for long-term career progress. Along with this, salary and extra benefits are viewed as the largest expectation gap between employers and workers, showing the real separation between workplace practices and employee expectations (Randstad Malaysia, 2025b). Understanding these results, workplace conditions must be adjusted by leaders to support both internal and external factors so that employee retention can be improved.

The challenge is particularly pronounced within Malaysia's private higher education sector. Historically, academic staff turnover has remained persistently high. The Malaysian Employers Federation (MEF, 2012) reported turnover rates of approximately 30% among private higher education institutions between 2010 and 2011. Subsequently, turnover within Malaysia's education sector increased from 13.2% in 2013 to 20% in 2017 (Falahat et al., 2019), while private universities recorded annual turnover rates of approximately 26%, compared with only 11% in public universities (GuiXia & Rashid, 2019). During the COVID-19 pandemic, it had further increased turnover within the education sector to 29.2% (Harun & Ahmad, 2022). Despite these findings revealing that lecturer retention has been an issue for a long time, current evidence shows that the expectations of the workforce have not only applied to remuneration but also included recognition, career progression, leadership support and meaningful work.

The pervasiveness of the issue is much more prevalent in Sabah state, where the socioeconomic status is an additional barrier to adequately retain a qualified academic staff. Sabah has manufactured an unemployment rate of 7.9% in the period 2024, which is considerably higher than the national average (Department of Statistics Malaysia [DOSM], 2025). Moreover, Interstate migration rate of Sabah residents sharply increased from 13.1% in 2020 to 41.9% in 2022 (DOSM, 2022), signifying a surging brain drain of skilled human capital to other states. Consequently, the net loss in the qualified academic staff poses a perennial problem for retaining the academic staff in private higher education institutions in Sabah, particularly in Kota Kinabalu. The Sabah Development Corridor Blueprint 2.0 (SDB 2.0) program is a government initiative to provide a holistically balanced socioeconomic development plan in Sabah, including building human capital and retain our talents. However, challenges such as limited funds reserve, limited research opportunities and escalating academic workload, exacerbated by the recent pandemic situation, has become a severe hindrance to academia and thereby leading to lecturer burnout with a low job satisfaction and a high intention to quit academia (Masrinie et al., 2022).

Despite being of great interest to both scholars and practitioners, employee turnover has not been adequately defended. To begin with, a great deal of the research that has been conducted on the topic of employees has primarily focused on employee turnover, rather than employee retention. Secondly, the theory of the Two-Factor Theory of motivation is one of the most commonly discussed theories in the world of management and organizational psychology; however, there have been few empirical studies that have discussed the theory within Malaysian private higher education institutions. Furthermore, those few studies that have discussed the theory have primarily focused on higher education institutions that are situated in Peninsular Malaysia. As a result, there is a lack of research regarding employee retention within Malaysian private higher education institutions, especially those that are situated in the state of Sabah.

Accordingly, this conceptual paper proposes a quantitative, cross-sectional study to examine how Herzberg's motivator factors and hygiene factors influence lecturers' job satisfaction and how job satisfaction, in turn, influences employee retention in PHEIs in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah. Job satisfaction is proposed as the mediating mechanism linking the workplace factors to employee retention. The target population comprises full-time lecturers employed in registered PHEIs in Kota Kinabalu. Respondents will be selected using purposive sampling, and the required sample size will be established through an a priori statistical power analysis before the main survey. Data will be collected using a structured questionnaire and analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics and PLS-SEM in SmartPLS. No empirical findings are reported in this conceptual paper because data collection has not yet commenced.

Research Gap

Several empirical, theoretical, and contextual gaps justify the need for this study.

Empirical Gap

Previous studies have examined workplace factors associated with turnover and retention, including recognition, career advancement, workload, job security, organisational support, and leadership (Alam & Asim, 2019; Halid et al., 2020; Orpina et al., 2022). However, much of this literature emphasises turnover intention rather than employee retention and often examines workplace factors separately. Consequently, limited empirical evidence explains how Herzberg's motivator and hygiene factors operate together through job satisfaction to shape lecturers' intention to stay. The proposed study addresses this empirical gap by testing these factors within one mediated model focused specifically on employee retention.

Theoretical Gap

Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory remains influential in explaining employee motivation and job satisfaction, yet its contemporary applicability varies across organisational and cultural settings. Existing studies do not consistently establish the relative importance of motivator and hygiene factors, particularly in post-pandemic workplaces where employee expectations have changed. More importantly, few studies integrate both factor groups within a single structural model that positions job satisfaction as the mechanism linking workplace conditions to employee retention. The proposed study therefore tests whether Herzberg's distinction between motivators and hygiene factors retains explanatory relevance for lecturer retention in a contemporary private higher education setting.

Contextual Gap

Employee retention research in Malaysia has predominantly focused on Peninsular Malaysia, while evidence from East Malaysia, particularly Sabah, remains limited (Halid et al., 2020; Orpina et al., 2022). This matters because Sabah faces distinct contextual conditions, including talent migration, limited institutional resources, a smaller academic labour market, and specific regional development priorities (Department of Statistics Malaysia [DOSM], 2022; Sabah Development Corridor Blueprint 2.0, 2021). Studies specifically examining retention among lecturers in Sabah's PHEIs are scarce (Masrinie et al., 2022; Halid et al., 2020). Focusing on Kota Kinabalu therefore addresses a clearly defined contextual gap and provides a basis for locally relevant retention strategies.

Research Contribution

This proposed research is expected to contribute in three ways. Theoretically, it will test Herzberg's motivator-hygiene distinction within a single mediated framework in which job satisfaction links workplace factors to employee retention. Rather than claiming to enrich the theory broadly, the study is expected to clarify whether the theory's core distinctions remain explanatory in a contemporary private higher education context and whether their effects on retention operate through job satisfaction.

Empirically, the study will provide evidence on employee retention among full-time lecturers in PHEIs in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, a context that is less represented in Malaysian retention research. This focus is expected to complement evidence drawn mainly from Peninsular Malaysia and from studies that emphasise turnover intention rather than intention to stay.

Practically, the proposed findings are expected to help institutional leaders and human resource practitioners identify workplace conditions associated with lecturers' job satisfaction and retention. Such evidence may support more context-sensitive strategies for strengthening workforce stability and the long-term sustainability of PHEIs in Sabah.

Literature Review

Theoretical and empirical literature concerning employee retention is examined in the present section, while special focus is given to Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory. It synthesises previous studies on the relationships among motivator factors, hygiene factors, job satisfaction, and employee retention to establish the theoretical foundation and support the development of the proposed conceptual framework and research hypotheses.

Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory

Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory is one of the most established theories used to explain employee motivation and job satisfaction. The theory distinguishes motivator or intrinsic factors that can enhance satisfaction from hygiene or extrinsic factors that can reduce dissatisfaction (Herzberg et al., 1959). Herzberg proposed that satisfaction and dissatisfaction are distinct rather than opposite states; therefore, removing sources of dissatisfaction does not necessarily create higher job satisfaction. Motivators such as recognition, growth, responsibility, achievement, and meaningful work are expected to foster positive motivation and satisfaction (Herzberg et al., 1959).

Herzberg's factors were introduced over six decades ago and yet it has still been shown that both intrinsic and extrinsic factors play an important role in influencing job satisfaction and retention in the workplace in various industries, including higher education (Mitsakis & Galanakis, 2022; Zamri, 2023). However, previous studies have shown conflicting results on the relative importance of motivator and hygiene in the post-pandemic workplace, where it is anticipated that expectations of employees are considerably different from before the pandemic. This legitimises the need for a further empirical study to confirm Herzberg's theory in the private higher education sector.

Motivator Factors and Job Satisfaction

Motivator factors refer to intrinsic characteristics of work that enhance employees' psychological fulfilment and encourage greater job satisfaction (Herzberg et al., 1959). Within higher education institutions, lecturers derive satisfaction not only from teaching itself but also from professional recognition, autonomy in academic responsibilities, meaningful work, and opportunities for career advancement. These intrinsic factors strengthen employees' sense of accomplishment, competence, and organisational commitment, thereby encouraging them to remain engaged with their institutions (Jo & Shin, 2025).

Recognition is linked to higher morale and commitment from employees. It makes them feel like they are valued for the work they do (Jo & Shin, 2025). Job autonomy improves the motivation of workers to complete tasks because they are able to make their own decisions about how they do their job. The nature of academic work also contributes to job satisfaction for lecturers as they find their work to be stimulating and meaningful. Finally, opportunities for career advancement contribute to the long-term commitment of lecturers to their institutions as it provides them with the chance to get promoted and to develop professionally through opportunities for research. Collectively, these motivator factors fulfil employees' higher-order psychological needs and represent important antecedents of job satisfaction (Herzberg et al., 1959; Lee et al., 2023; Pillagara, 2025).

Hygiene Factors and Job Satisfaction

Hygiene factors are extrinsic workplace conditions that prevent job dissatisfaction among employees and provide an overall supportive working environment (Herzberg et al., 1959). In the context of higher education, higher salary, appropriate workload, good interpersonal relationships, and job security are often considered essential aspects of hygiene factors that influence job satisfaction among lecturers. These hygiene factors do not help to increase employees' performance or motivation, but poor hygiene conditions are more likely to cause dissatisfaction and reduce employees' adaptive engagement in work behaviours, including intentions of staying on and leaving (Herzberg et al., 1959; Halid et al., 2020). Currently, higher salary is a key competitiveness factor among private higher education institutions. Excessive workload, including teaching, research, and administrative duties, can cause high occupational stress and risk of burnout, resulting in lower levels of job satisfaction. Positive interpersonal relationships lead to greater organisational support, improved well-being, and behavioural commitment, while ensuring job security can also improve employees' confidence and trust in their future employment. All these positive workplace conditions could facilitate a supportive organisational environment and reduce employees' turnover intentions (Samad & Yusof, 2023; Diehl et al., 2021; Probst, 2003).

Job Satisfaction and Employee Retention

Job satisfaction has consistently been recognised as one of the strongest predictors of employee retention across organisational settings (Alam & Asim, 2019; Orpina et al., 2022). When workers feel high levels of job satisfaction, strong commitment to the organization is manifested by these individuals, along with deeper work engagement and intention to stay in their positions. Inside tertiary educational centers, satisfied academic instructors enhance teaching quality, research output, student growth, and institutional continuity because job satisfaction strengthens their work dedication (Orpina et al., 2022; Masrinie et al., 2022).

In academic studies, it has been observed that job satisfaction acts as a central psychological bridge connecting workplace conditions to employee retention. Instead of affecting employee retention through direct path, both motivator factors and hygiene factors influence the overall job satisfaction of personnel, thereby directs their choice to remain with a firm. By analyzing job satisfaction as a mediating factor, a clearer understanding of workplace influence on employee retention is achieved by researchers compared to studying direct connections by themselves (Mitsakis & Galanakis, 2022; Orpina et al., 2022).

Synthesis of Literature

The literature suggests that employee retention is determined by a combination of intrinsic and extrinsic factors at the workplace. Motivator factors are intrinsic to the work itself and result in higher levels of job satisfaction, while hygiene factors are extrinsic to the work but contribute to lower levels of job dissatisfaction (Herzberg et al., 1959). The existing literature indicates that there are connections between these workplace elements and employee outcomes, but there have been issues with how research has been conducted to examine these relationships. Specifically, much of the research in this field only examines individual variables within each of these factors or has focused on studying employee turnover rather than employee retention (Alam & Asim, 2019; Orpina et al., 2022). Furthermore, the application of Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory within the private higher education sector of Malaysia, and specifically in Sabah, has been very minimal. Given the limitations of the existing literature in this area, this study aims to examine the combined influence of intrinsic and extrinsic workplace factors on the retention of lecturers within private higher education institutions in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, through the mediating influence of job satisfaction.

Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses Development

This study proposes a conceptual model grounded in Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory. The model is stated explicitly as Motivator Factors + Hygiene Factors → Job Satisfaction → Employee Retention. Motivator factors (recognition, job autonomy, nature of work, and career advancement) and hygiene factors (salary, workload, interpersonal relationships, and job security) are proposed to influence lecturers' job satisfaction, while job satisfaction is proposed to influence employee retention. Job satisfaction therefore functions as the mediating variable through which the eight workplace factors are hypothesised to affect lecturers' intention to stay.

Job Satisfaction and Employee Retention

Job satisfaction has been reliably identified as one of the most powerful predictors of employee retention in organisational contexts (Alam & Asim, 2019; Orpina et al., 2022). The extent to

which employees are content with their work is a significant predictor of their level of commitment to the organisation, as well as turnover intention and their willingness to stay with the organisation. Within private higher education institutions, satisfied lecturers are expected to contribute more effectively to teaching, research, and institutional development. Hence, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Job satisfaction positively influences employee retention.

Motivator Factors, Job Satisfaction, and Employee Retention

Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory proposes that motivator factors enhance employees' intrinsic motivation and generate positive work attitudes by satisfying higher-level psychological needs (Herzberg et al., 1959). Within higher education institutions, recognition, job autonomy, nature of work, and career advancement have consistently been identified as important determinants of lecturers' job satisfaction because they foster professional achievement, meaningful work experiences, and career fulfilment (Jo & Shin, 2025; Lee et al., 2023; Pillagara, 2025). Previous empirical studies further suggest that lecturers who experience higher levels of intrinsic motivation are more tending to remain committed to their institutions through increased job satisfaction (Mitsakis & Galanakis, 2022). Accordingly, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H2: Recognition positively influences job satisfaction.

H3: Job autonomy positively influences job satisfaction.

H4: Nature of work positively influences job satisfaction.

H5: Career advancement positively influences job satisfaction.

Hygiene Factors, Job Satisfaction, and Employee Retention

Herzberg's theoretical framework shows that hygiene factors describe outer working conditions which are needed so that dissatisfaction is prevented and a helpful working environment is created (Herzberg et al., 1959). Salary, workload, interpersonal relationships, and job security have been widely recognised as important workplace conditions influencing lecturers' job satisfaction and organisational commitment (Diehl et al., 2021; Samad & Yusof, 2023; Probst, 2003). If such workplace conditions satisfy the hope of working personnel, lecturers gain good work mindsets while remaining loyal toward their educational institutions because their requirements are fulfilled. Consequently, the stated hypotheses are presented below:

H6: Salary positively influences job satisfaction.

H7: Workload positively influences job satisfaction.

H8: Interpersonal relationships positively influence job satisfaction.

H9: Job security positively influences job satisfaction.

Mediating Role of Job Satisfaction

Herzberg's theory suggests that workplace characteristics do not influence employee retention independently but primarily through their effects on employees' job satisfaction. Motivator factors increase employees' job satisfaction, while hygiene factors decrease their dissatisfaction. As such, employees' job satisfaction plays a key role in connecting their experiences at work with their decisions to stay with the company (Mitsakis & Galanakis, 2022;

Orpina et al., 2022). The mediation hypotheses presented within this study are based upon this theoretical perspective.

H10: Job satisfaction mediates the relationship between recognition and employee retention.

H11: Job satisfaction mediates the relationship between job autonomy and employee retention.

H12: Job satisfaction mediates the relationship between nature of work and employee retention.

H13: Job satisfaction mediates the relationship between career advancement and employee retention.

H14: Job satisfaction mediates the relationship between salary and employee retention.

H15: Job satisfaction mediates the relationship between workload and employee retention.

H16: Job satisfaction mediates the relationship between interpersonal relationships and employee retention.

H17: Job satisfaction mediates the relationship between job security and employee retention.

Table 1: Summary of Research Hypotheses

Hypothesis	Relationship	Expected Effect
H1	Job Satisfaction → Employee Retention	Positive
H2	Recognition → Job Satisfaction	Positive
H3	Job Autonomy → Job Satisfaction	Positive
H4	Nature of Work → Job Satisfaction	Positive
H5	Career Advancement → Job Satisfaction	Positive
H6	Salary → Job Satisfaction	Positive
H7	Workload → Job Satisfaction	Positive
H8	Interpersonal Relationships → Job Satisfaction	Positive
H9	Job Security → Job Satisfaction	Positive
H10–H17	Job Satisfaction mediates each IV → Employee Retention	Positive Mediation

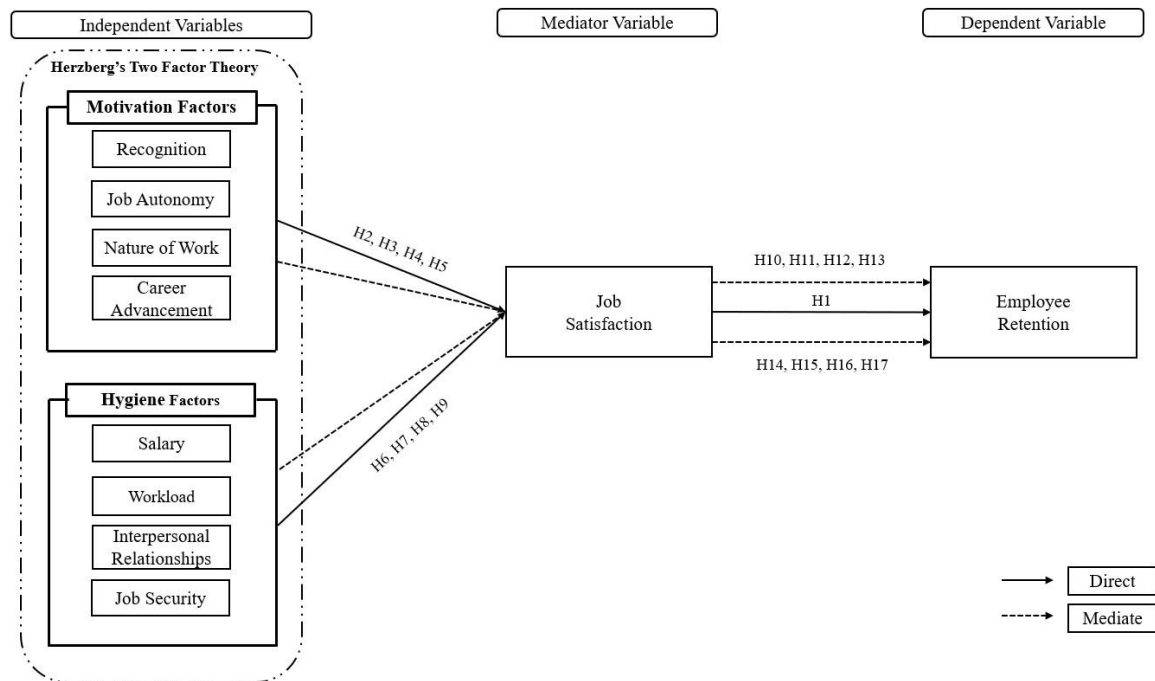


Figure 1: Proposed Conceptual Framework

Source: Adapted from Herzberg et al. (1959) and developed by the authors

Methodology

To determine the relationships between Herzberg's motivator and hygiene factors, job satisfaction, and employee retention among lecturers in private higher education institutions (PHEIs) in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, this study adopts a quantitative, cross-sectional research design. A quantitative approach is relevant because it enables the proposed conceptual framework and research hypotheses to be empirically tested using statistical techniques, while a cross-sectional design facilitates the collection of data at a single point in time to examine relationships among multiple variables efficiently (Creswell & Creswell, 2023; Saunders et al., 2023).

The target population comprises full-time lecturers employed in registered private higher education institutions in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah. Respondents will be selected using non-probability purposive sampling because participation is restricted to lecturers who meet the study's eligibility criteria. The necessary sample size will be obtained by an a priori statistical power analysis suitable for the proposed PLS-SEM model. Data will be collected by administering structured, self-administered questionnaires. A five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree) will be used to measure each of the constructs.

Before the main survey, the questionnaire will undergo expert review to assess content validity, followed by a pilot study to evaluate instrument clarity and reliability. Ethical approval for the proposed study has been obtained from the Research Ethics Committee, Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Cawangan Sabah (Approval Reference No. 600-UiTMC (PJI/UPP.5/1/6)). Data collection has not yet commenced. Participation will be voluntary, informed consent will be obtained, and respondents' confidentiality and anonymity will be protected.

The data collected will be subjected to analysis using IBM SPSS Statistics and SmartPLS. The SPSS will be employed for conducting the descriptive analysis and the preliminary screening of the data, whilst SmartPLS will be used for evaluating the measurement and structural models using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM). PLS-SEM will be used as it allows analysis of multiple relationships, mediation effects and latent constructs, making it well-suited for theory building and prediction (Hair et al., 2022).

Table 2: Summary of Research Methodology

Methodological Component	Description
Research Design	Quantitative, Cross-sectional
Population	Full-time lecturers in registered Private Higher Education Institutions, Kota Kinabalu, Sabah
Sampling Technique	Non-probability Purposive Sampling
Data Collection	
Method	Self-administered Questionnaire
Measurement Scale	Five-point Likert Scale
Data Analysis	IBM SPSS Statistics & SmartPLS (PLS-SEM)
Unit of Analysis	Individual Lecturer
Mediator	Job Satisfaction
Dependent Variable	Employee Retention

Expected Contributions

This study is expected to contribute to the literature and practice by advancing theoretical understanding, providing empirical insights, and offering practical recommendations for employee retention within private higher education institutions (PHEIs).

Theoretical Contribution

From a theoretical perspective, the proposed study is expected to extend the contextual application of Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory rather than claim to establish a universal extension of the theory. By integrating motivator and hygiene factors in one mediated model, the study will test whether Herzberg's distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic workplace conditions remains useful for explaining lecturers' job satisfaction and employee retention in a contemporary PHEI setting. The mediating role of job satisfaction will further clarify the mechanism through which these factors may be associated with intention to stay (Herzberg et al., 1959; Mitsakis & Galanakis, 2022).

Because relatively few studies have examined these relationships within Malaysia's private higher education sector, particularly in Sabah, the proposed study is expected to refine understanding of the boundary conditions and contextual relevance of Herzberg's framework rather than assume that its relationships operate identically across sectors and regions.

Empirical Contribution

Empirically, the proposed study will address limited evidence on employee retention among lecturers in PHEIs in East Malaysia. Prior studies have largely focused on organisations in Peninsular Malaysia or on turnover intention rather than employee retention (Alam & Asim, 2019; Orpina et al., 2022). Evidence from full-time lecturers in Kota Kinabalu is expected to clarify how motivator and hygiene factors are associated with employee retention through job satisfaction in an underexplored regional context.

Practical Contribution

Realistically, these future findings can help leaders of universities, professionals in human resources, and policymakers to come up with better strategies for keeping lecturers at their institutions. Research that has been published indicates that a supportive workplace atmosphere and satisfaction with one's job are related to commitment and retention of employees (Orpina et al., 2022; Masrinie et al., 2022). Therefore, the evidence from these future studies may inform the practices that human resource professionals adopt to promote lecturers' retention, stability of the workforce, and the overall sustainability of an institution.

Conclusion

Employee retention among lecturers remains an important concern for PHEIs seeking to maintain a stable and qualified academic workforce. This conceptual paper proposes a model grounded in Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory in which motivator and hygiene factors are hypothesised to influence employee retention through the mediating role of job satisfaction. The framework integrates intrinsic and extrinsic workplace conditions to explain why lecturers may choose to remain with their institutions (Herzberg et al., 1959; Orpina et al., 2022).

The paper identifies theoretical and empirical and contextual limitations to the current body of literature regarding employee retention and presents a new, specifically tailored framework for evaluating employee retention among lecturers in private higher education in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah. The integration of Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory with the mediation of job satisfaction will provide a base for future empirical studies related to lecturer retention as well as offer a structural approach toward understanding lecturer retention throughout Malaysia's private higher education sector.

Empirical validation of the proposed model would be required through future studies employing data gathered from lecturers in private higher education institutions to identify the relationships among the proposed variables. It is anticipated that the results will serve to enhance the knowledge concerning employee retention and assist in developing evidence-based human resources practices for improving lecturer retention. Improved lecturer retention is critical to enhance organizational performance, improve instructional quality, increase institutional resilience, and ultimately ensure the long-term sustainability and competition of Malaysia's private higher education sector.

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- Acknowledgements:** The authors wish to convey their heartfelt appreciation to the Faculty of Business and Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Cawangan Sabah, for extending academic assistance during this research. The authors would like to thank colleagues, reviewers, and everyone who offered insightful comments and constructive feedback that helped enhance the quality of this paper.
- Funding Statement:** No Funding. This study did not obtain any particular funding from public, commercial, or nonprofit agencies. The study was self-funded by the researcher.
- Conflict of Interest Statement:** The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest concerning the publication of this document. Every author has participated in this work and has endorsed the final version of the manuscript for submission to the International Journal of Education, Psychology and Counselling (IJEPC).
- Ethics Statement:** This conceptual paper presents the proposed research framework and methodology for a study involving human participants. Ethical approval for the proposed study has been obtained from the Research Ethics Committee, Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Cawangan Sabah, Approval Reference No. 600-UiTMC (PJI/UPP.5/1/6). As of now, data gathering has not started yet. Consent will be obtained from all participants before data collection, and participation will be completely voluntary. Participants will be guaranteed confidentiality and anonymity, and all information will be used exclusively for research purposes in the academic field.
- Author Contribution Statement:** Faridah Mohd Shah was responsible for the conceptualization, literature review, methodology, conceptual framework development, and preparation of the original manuscript. Associate Professor Dr. Imelda Albert Gisip oversaw the research, offered academic advice, critically assessed the manuscript, and aided in its revision and enhancement. All authors examined, endorsed, and consented to the final version of the manuscript before submission.
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