

Unlocking the Secret to Employee Retention in Private Higher Education

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Abstract

This study underscores the critical importance of employee retention in private higher education institutions, recognizing that talented and engaged staff are fundamental to institutional success and sustainable growth. The primary aim was to investigate the influence of professional development opportunities and work-life balance on employee engagement and retention, with employee engagement functioning as a mediator. A comprehensive survey was conducted among academic and non-academic staff, and 311 responses were deemed valid for analysis. Data analysis employed Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) using SmartPLS, enabling the evaluation of hypothesized relationships. The results indicated that PDO and WLB significantly influence EE, which in turn strongly affects ER. Specifically, the direct effect of PDO on ER was not significant, but its indirect effect via EE was confirmed, highlighting the mediating role of engagement. WLB directly affects both EE and ER significantly. The study contributes to existing theoretical frameworks like the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model and Social Exchange Theory (SET), emphasizing engagement as a critical mediating factor. Future research should consider longitudinal designs, explore other potential mediators or moderators, and examine different cultural or organizational contexts for broader generalization. Practically, institutions are encouraged to invest strategically in employee development and work-life balance initiatives to foster higher engagement levels,

ultimately improving retention. Overall, this study provides both theoretical insights and actionable strategies for higher education leadership committed to strengthening employee retention through targeted resource allocation and organizational support.

Keywords: Professional Development Opportunities, Work-Life Balance, Employee Engagement, Employee Retention, Higher Education Institutions

Introduction

Employee retention in Private Higher Education Institutions (PHEIs) is a critical area that significantly influences institutional effectiveness, faculty morale, and student satisfaction. Retaining qualified academic staff fosters a stable educational environment, essential for student learning and institutional reputation. However, PHEIs face various challenges that affect employee retention, including job satisfaction, workload, and insufficient recognition (Mather & Bam, 2025). Currently, global trends indicate a shift towards recognizing the role of emotional intelligence and workplace spirituality in enhancing retention rates among academic staff (Kebah et al., 2019). For instance, Leena and Parashar (2024) highlight how leaders leveraging emotional intelligence can create a supportive workplace culture that encourages employee commitment. This focus is becoming increasingly vital as institutions seek to differentiate themselves in a competitive landscape (Kebah et al., 2019). Similarly, research by Verma and Kaur (2024) underscores the importance of organizational commitment and trust in fostering a positive HR climate conducive to retention. Despite these advancements, significant research gaps persist in understanding employee retention in PHEIs (Intaratat et al., 2024). For example, while studies point to the impact of HR strategies on retention (Chi et al., 2024), there is limited empirical evidence specifically targeted at PHEIs, particularly in diverse geographic and cultural contexts. Additionally, existing literature often overlooks the nuanced experiences of staff across different roles, such as administrative versus academic, which can significantly influence retention strategies. The problems surrounding employee retention in PHEIs include high turnover rates, which can be exacerbated by inadequate leadership qualities and ineffective talent management practices (Leontes, 2024; Asianab & Amouzou, 2024). These challenges not only disrupt the educational process but also increase recruitment costs and negatively impact institutional knowledge and continuity. The significance of studying employee retention extends beyond academic circles, impacting policymakers, educators, and students alike. Policymakers can develop targeted interventions aimed at enhancing retention strategies, which can result in improved educational quality and institutional sustainability (Popescu & Verma, 2025). For higher education institutions, retaining qualified staff leads to enhanced teaching quality, ultimately benefiting students. Furthermore, understanding retention dynamics can inform strategic human resource management approaches, equipping institutions with the necessary tools to build a committed faculty body (McClure & Sallee, 2025; Agboola, 2025). Tackling employee retention in PHEIs requires a comprehensive understanding of current issues and trends, addressing existing research gaps, and developing informed policies and practices. This multi-faceted approach not only aids institutional development but also enhances the overall educational experience for students. This study aims to assess the direct and indirect relationship between professional development opportunities and work-life balance, with employee retention with employee engagement as mediator in private higher education institutions.

Literature Review

Underpinning theory

The proposed study leverages an integrated framework combining the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) and Social Exchange Theory (SET) (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005) to investigate the interplay between professional development opportunities, work-life balance, employee engagement, and employee retention. The JD-R Model posits that job resources, such as professional development and a supportive work-life balance, foster employee engagement, which acts as a catalyst for positive outcomes like retention. In this framework, professional development opportunities enhance employees' skills and confidence, leading to higher engagement levels. Similarly, work-life balance contributes to reduced stress and burnout, enabling employees to be more committed to their roles and ultimately improving job satisfaction. Integrating SET enriches this analysis by emphasizing the reciprocal nature of the employee-employer relationship. When organizations offer valuable resources like professional development and promote work-life balance, employees perceive this support positively, leading to increased engagement. This heightened engagement fosters a sense of obligation to reciprocate through increased loyalty and retention. Therefore, the relationship can be summarized as follows: job resources enhance engagement, while engaged employees feel a stronger commitment to the organization, leading to improved retention outcomes. Furthermore, understanding this synergy is crucial for designing effective retention strategies that align with employees' expectations and organizational goals. This integrated approach provides a comprehensive understanding of how professional development and work-life balance contribute to employee retention through the mediating role of employee engagement.

Relationship between Professional Development Opportunities, Employee Engagement & Employee Retention

Professional development opportunities significantly enhance employee retention in private higher education institutions by fostering career growth, skill enhancement, and job satisfaction (Hosen et al., 2024). When faculty and staff are provided with training, workshops, and advancement pathways, they perceive greater value in their roles, reducing turnover intentions (Achmad et al., 2023). However, this relationship is often mediated by employee engagement, a critical factor that bridges development initiatives and retention (Chopra et al., 2024; Biswakarma & Subedi, 2025). Engaged employees, who are emotionally invested and motivated, are more likely to stay with an institution (Poku et al., 2025). Professional development boosts engagement by empowering employees, increasing their commitment, and aligning their goals with organizational objectives (Ahmed et al., 2024). In private higher education, where talent competition is high, engaged employees are less likely to seek opportunities elsewhere (Achmad et al., 2023). Institutions that prioritize continuous learning and career advancement create a culture of engagement, which in turn strengthens retention (Hosen et al., 2024). Therefore, investing in professional development not only enhances skills but also nurtures a loyal, motivated workforce (Biswakarma & Subedi, 2025). For private universities, this strategy is essential to maintaining a competitive edge and sustaining long-term institutional success (Chopra et al., 2024). Therefore, the following hypotheses were proposed for this study:

H1: There is a relationship between professional development opportunities and

employee engagement towards employee retention in private higher education institutions.

H2: There is a relationship between professional development opportunities and employee retention in private higher education institutions.

H3: There is a mediating effect of employee engagement on the relationship between professional development opportunities and employee retention in private higher education institutions.

Relationship between Work-Life Balance, Employee Engagement & Employee Retention

In private higher education institutions, maintaining a healthy work-life balance is increasingly recognized as a critical factor influencing employee retention (Hendriana et al., 2023). The demanding nature of academic roles, which often extend beyond traditional working hours due to teaching, research, and administrative responsibilities, can lead to burnout and high turnover if not properly managed (Wr & Rusdi, 2025; Nguyen et al., 2025). When institutions implement policies and practices that promote work-life balance, such as flexible scheduling, remote work options, and wellness programs, employees experience reduced stress and greater job satisfaction, making them more likely to remain with the organization (Shyamadanthi & Kaluarachchige, 2023; Triningsih & Darma, 2024). However, the connection between work-life balance and retention is not direct; it is significantly strengthened through the mediating role of employee engagement (Romiyatun & Prasilowati, 2025; Li et al., 2020). Employees who feel their personal and professional lives are balanced tend to be more emotionally invested in their work, demonstrating higher levels of motivation, commitment, and productivity (Wibaselpa et al., 2025). This heightened engagement fosters a deeper connection to the institution, reducing the likelihood of employees seeking opportunities elsewhere (Hendriana et al., 2023). In the competitive environment of private higher education, where attracting and retaining top talent is essential, institutions that prioritize work-life balance cultivate a more engaged workforce, which in turn enhances retention (Shyamadanthi & Kaluarachchige, 2023; Mohamad & Osman, 2025). By addressing the holistic needs of employees both inside and outside the workplace, these institutions create a supportive culture that not only retains talent but also strengthens overall organizational performance and reputation in the long term (Triningsih & Darma, 2024; Wibaselpa et al., 2025). Thus, the following hypotheses were proposed for this study:

H4: There is a relationship between work-life balance and employee engagement towards employee retention in private higher education institutions.

H5: There is a relationship between work-life balance and employee retention in private higher education institutions.

H6: There is a relationship between employee engagement and employee retention in private higher education institutions.

H7: There is a mediating effect of employee engagement on the relationship between Work-life balance and employee retention in private higher education institutions.

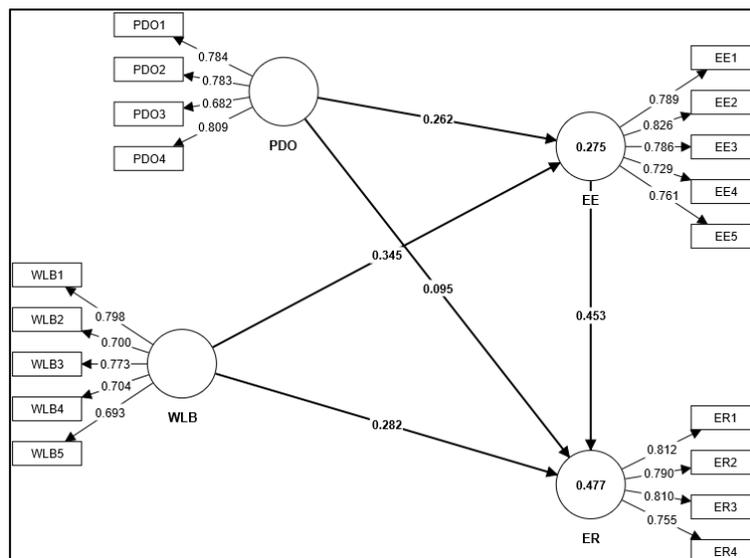


Figure 1: Research Model

Note: PDO=Professional Development Opportunities WLB=Work-Life Balance EE=Employee Engagement ER=Employee Retention

Methodology

This research explored the intricate relationships among professional development opportunities, work-life balance, and employee retention within private higher education institutions, emphasizing the mediating influence of employee engagement. To ensure the reliability and validity of the measurements, a rigorous data collection approach was implemented. The survey instruments were carefully chosen based on prior scholarly work. The questionnaire included 18 observed variables: the independent variables professional development opportunities (4 items) drawn from Noe (2010) and work-life balance (5 items) adapted from Greenhaus & Allen (2011); the mediating variable, employee engagement (5 items), sourced from Saks (2006); and the dependent variable, employee retention (4 items), based on Hom & Griffeth (1995). Respondents rated each construct using a 5-point Likert scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Due to the absence of a complete population list, purposive sampling was employed. Of 410 distributed surveys, 322 responses were returned, resulting in a response rate of 78.5%, which supported the use of structural equation modeling (SEM) for analysis. After data cleaning, 311 responses were considered suitable for analysis. The study used SmartPLS software, recognized for its SEM capabilities, to analyze data and test hypotheses because of its strong assessment features and ability to manage multivariate data, consistent with the study's aims and recommendations from Ringle et al. (2022). SmartPLS enabled a comprehensive evaluation of both the measurement and structural models, supporting a detailed investigation of the proposed hypotheses.

Data Analysis

Respondents' Profiles

The demographic profile of the study participants offers a comprehensive overview of their characteristics. In terms of gender, the sample included 188 males, representing 60.5% of the total, and 123 females, accounting for 39.5%, indicating a higher male participation. Concerning age, the distribution is as follows: 8.0% (25 individuals) are under 30 years old; 23.2% (73 individuals) fall within the 31 to 40 age bracket; the largest group, 40.2% (125 individuals), are between 41 and 50 years old; 19.9% (62 individuals) are aged 51 to 60; and

8.7% (27 individuals) are over 60 years old. This range reflects a diverse age distribution, with a notable concentration in the 41 to 50 age group. Looking at years of service, 5.8% (18 individuals) have less than 5 years, 13.8% (43 individuals) have between 6 and 10 years, and the largest segment, 29.9% (93 individuals), is in the 11 to 15-year range. Participants with 16 to 20 years of service make up 16.7% (52 individuals), while 12.5% (39 individuals) have served for 21 to 25 years. The groups with 26 to 30 years and over 30 years of service include 4.8% (15 individuals) and 16.4% (51 individuals), respectively. Regarding professional roles, 56.6% (176 participants) are academicians, with the remaining 43.4% (135 participants) identified as non-academicians.

Common Method Bias

The VIF values presented in Table 1 for all constructs, employee retention, professional development opportunities, work-life balance, and employee engagement are well below the threshold of 3.3, indicating that multicollinearity and common method bias are unlikely concerns in this study. As recommended by Kock and Lynn (2012) and Kock (2015), assessing full collinearity using the VIF provides an effective way to detect potential common method bias. The low VIF values suggest that the measurement model is free from significant bias stemming from the data collection process. This enhances confidence in the validity of the findings, as the likelihood that variance inflation from common method variance influences the results is minimal. Consequently, the data demonstrate robustness against common method bias, supporting the reliability of the subsequent structural model analysis. Overall, these findings validate the measured relationships among the constructs, aligning with best practices outlined in the referenced literature.

Table 1
Full Collinearity (VIF)

	ER	PDO	WLB	EE
ER		1.844	1.701	1.456
PDO	1.391		1.276	1.365
WLB	1.451	1.443		1.563
EE	1.357	1.686	1.708	

Measurement Model

Based on the data presented in Table 2, the construct reliability and validity analysis align with the standards outlined by Hair et al. (2019) and Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio criteria from Henseler et al. (2015). The Cronbach's Alpha (CA) values for all constructs, Employee Engagement (0.838), Employee Retention (0.803), Professional Development Opportunities (0.764), and Work-Life Balance (0.787), exceed the acceptable threshold of 0.7, indicating good internal consistency. Similarly, the Composite Reliability (CR) values for each construct (ranging from 0.766 to 0.842) surpass the recommended cutoff of 0.7, further confirming construct reliability and internal consistency. The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) scores for each construct (ranging from 0.541 to 0.628) are above the minimum acceptable level of 0.50, demonstrating adequate convergent validity. Item loadings, all above 0.682, support that the items are valid indicators of their respective constructs. For discriminant validity, the HTMT ratios as recommended by Henseler et al. (2015) are all below the threshold of 0.85 (with the highest being 0.664 for WLB3 and WLB4), indicating adequate discriminant validity among the constructs. Overall, these indicators confirm that the measurement model demonstrates

satisfactory reliability and validity, providing confidence in the accuracy and distinctiveness of the constructs measured.

Table 2

Construct Reliability and Validity, Items Loadings & HTMT

Constructs	Items	Loadings	CA	CR	AVE	EE	HTMT	
							ER	PDO
Employee	EE1	0.789	0.838	0.842	0.607	0.753		
Engagement	EE2	0.826						
	EE3	0.786						
	EE4	0.729						
	EE5	0.761						
Employee	ER1	0.812	0.803	0.81	0.628	0.753		
Retention	ER2	0.790						
	ER3	0.810						
	ER4	0.755						
Professional	PDO1	0.784	0.764	0.766	0.587	0.526	0.534	
Development	PDO2	0.783						
Opportunities	PDO3	0.682						
	PDO4	0.809						
Work	WLB1	0.798	0.787	0.789	0.541	0.567	0.664	0.619
Life	WLB2	0.700						
Balance	WLB3	0.773						
	WLB4	0.704						
	WLB5	0.693						

Note: CA=Cronbach Alpha CR=Composite Reliability AVE=Average Variance Extracted

Structural Model

This research assessed the structural model by the procedures described by Hair et al. (2017), emphasizing the examination of pathway coefficients (β) and R^2 values. A Partial Least Squares (PLS) technique was employed, utilizing 5,000 bootstrap samples to evaluate the significance of the path coefficients. The findings, shown in Table 4, include beta weights, t-statistics, and p-values, offering detailed insights into the strength and statistical significance of the relationships between the variables. This rigorous approach strengthens the validity of the study's conclusions by providing a comprehensive understanding of how the variables interact within the model. The hypothesis testing results (Table 3) provide a comprehensive overview of the relationships among the variables, based on their beta coefficients, t-statistics, and p-values. For *H1*, the relationship between Professional Development Opportunities (PDO) and Employee Engagement (EE) yields a beta of 0.262, a t-statistic of 4.586, and a p-value of 0.000, indicating a significant positive influence, leading to the acceptance of *H1*. In contrast, *H2* hypothesizing that PDO impacts Employee Retention (ER) is not supported, as the beta of 0.095 is coupled with a t-statistic of 1.632 and a p-value of 0.103, which exceeds the typical significance threshold of 0.05, resulting in rejection. However, *H3*, which assesses the mediating effect of EE on the PDO-ER relationship, shows a beta of 0.118, a t-statistic of 3.771, and a p-value of 0.000, confirming a significant mediating effect and leading to its acceptance. The findings for work-life balance (WLB) indicate strong positive effects on both EE (*H4*; beta = 0.345, t = 6.361, p = 0.000) and ER (*H5*; beta = 0.282, t = 5.372,

$p = 0.000$), supporting their significant influence and resulting in the acceptance of both hypotheses. The direct influence of EE on ER ($H6$) demonstrates a robust positive relationship with a beta of 0.453, t-statistic of 8.639, and p-value of 0.000, confirming its significance. Lastly, $H7$ tests the mediating role of EE in the WLB-ER relationship, with a beta of 0.156, a t-statistic of 5.216, and a p-value of 0.000, indicating a significant indirect effect and leading to its acceptance. Overall, six hypotheses are supported, except for $H2$, emphasizing the critical roles of professional development, work-life balance, and employee engagement in influencing employee retention.

Table 3

Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypotheses	Beta	T statistics	P values	2.50%	97.50%	Decision
$H1$: PDO \rightarrow EE	0.262	4.586	0.000	0.143	0.370	Accepted
$H2$: PDO \rightarrow ER	0.095	1.632	0.103	-0.020	0.210	Rejected
$H3$: PDO \rightarrow EE \rightarrow ER	0.118	3.771	0.000	0.061	0.186	Accepted
$H4$: WLB \rightarrow EE	0.345	6.361	0.000	0.233	0.446	Accepted
$H5$: WLB \rightarrow ER	0.282	5.372	0.000	0.178	0.381	Accepted
$H6$: EE \rightarrow ER	0.453	8.639	0.000	0.351	0.557	Accepted
$H7$: WLB \rightarrow EE \rightarrow ER	0.156	5.216	0.000	0.103	0.218	Accepted

Notes: Significant $p < 0.05$, T value > 1.96

Effect Sizes (f^2)

Based on Cohen's (1992) guidelines, which categorize them as small (0.020 to 0.150), medium (0.150 to 0.350), or large (0.350 and above), the effect sizes (f^2) indicate that Employee Engagement (EE) has a large effect size of 0.284 on Employee Retention (ER), signifying a substantial impact. The effect of Professional Development Opportunities (PDO) on EE (0.072) is considered small, while its impact on ER (0.012) is negligible. Work-Life Balance (WLB) demonstrates a small to moderate effect on EE (0.126) and ER (0.103), reflecting a modest but meaningful influence. These effect sizes suggest that employee engagement has the most pronounced effect on retention, whereas professional development's direct influence is minimal, emphasizing the importance of fostering engagement for retention strategies.

Table 4

Effect Sizes (f^2)

	EE	ER
EE		0.284
PDO	0.072	0.012
WLB	0.126	0.103

PLSpredict & Cross-Validated Predictive Ability Test (CVPAT)

Based on the PLSpredict analysis (Table 5), following Shmueli et al. (2016, 2019), the RMSE values from PLS-SEM predictions generally exceeded those of the Linear Model (LM) benchmarks, indicating the model's competitive predictive performance. Specifically, for eight out of the ten indicators, EE1, EE2, EE3, EE4, EE5, ER1, ER2, and ER3, the PLS-RMSE values are smaller than the LM-RMSE, with differences ranging from 0.001 to 0.012. Only two indicators, ER4 and EE4, show slightly higher PLS-RMSEs compared to LM, suggesting that the PLS model offers superior predictive accuracy for the majority of constructs according to the

benchmark criteria. The CVPAT results (Table 6), following the guidelines of Hair et al. (2022) and Lienggaard et al. (2021), demonstrate significant predictive ability of the model. The negative average loss differences for EE (-0.079), ER (-0.106), and overall (-0.091) indicate the model's superior predictive performance compared to random benchmarks. The high t-values (EE: 4.065; ER: 5.121; overall: 5.223) and p-values of 0.000 confirm the statistical significance of these results. This suggests that the model offers strong predictive validity for the constructs studied, effectively capturing the underlying relationships and improving prediction accuracy.

Table 5

PLSPredict

	Q ² predict	PLS-RMSE	LM-RMSE	PLS-LM
EE1	0.211	0.637	0.636	0.001
EE2	0.177	0.633	0.641	-0.008
EE3	0.116	0.686	0.689	-0.003
EE4	0.114	0.707	0.72	-0.013
EE5	0.153	0.634	0.646	-0.012
ER1	0.266	0.627	0.638	-0.011
ER2	0.173	0.635	0.644	-0.009
ER3	0.206	0.687	0.699	-0.012
ER4	0.119	0.737	0.742	-0.005

Table 6

Cross-Validated Predictive Ability Test (CVPAT)

	Average loss difference	t value	p value
EE	-0.079	4.065	0.000
ER	-0.106	5.121	0.000
Overall	-0.091	5.223	0.000

Importance-Performance Map Analysis (IPMA)

The Importance-Performance Map Analysis (IPMA), following Ringle and Sarstedt (2016) and Hair et al. (2018), highlights Employee Engagement (EE) as having the highest importance (0.453) but a relatively moderate performance score (60.789). Work-Life Balance (WLB) follows closely in importance (0.438) with a slightly higher performance (65.941), while Professional Development Opportunities (PDO) shows the lowest importance (0.214) despite a higher performance score (66.628). To enhance employee retention effectively, strategic focus should be on improving areas with high importance but lower performance, namely EE. Strategies could include fostering a more engaging work environment, providing meaningful recognition, and promoting employee involvement in decision-making. Addressing these areas will likely yield a more significant impact on retention, aligning performance improvements with employee priorities.

Table 7

Importance-Performance Map Analysis (IPMA)

	Importance	Performance
EE	0.453	60.789
PDO	0.214	66.628
WLB	0.438	65.941

Discussion & Conclusion*Discussion*

Based on the study's findings, private higher education institutions should strategically focus on enhancing professional development opportunities (PDO) and work-life balance (WLB), as these factors significantly influence employee engagement (EE), which in turn positively impacts employee retention (ER). The statistical results reveal that PDO has a substantial direct effect on EE ($\beta = 0.262$), highlighting the importance of providing meaningful training, workshops, and career advancement programs to foster a more engaged workforce. Similarly, WLB demonstrates strong effects on both EE ($\beta = 0.345$) and ER ($\beta = 0.282$), suggesting that policies promoting flexible working hours, sabbaticals, and family-friendly initiatives substantially boost engagement levels and reduce turnover. Importantly, EE itself exerts a significant mediating influence on ER ($\beta = 0.453$), confirming that engaged employees are more likely to remain committed to their institutions (Chopra et al., 2024). Consequently, practical strategies should prioritize enhancing engagement by investing in tailored professional development programs and implementing flexible work arrangements that align with employees' needs (Poku et al., 2025). For instance, offering continuous learning opportunities and mentoring can directly increase engagement, while flexible scheduling fosters work-life harmony, further boosting job satisfaction. Institutions could also establish recognition systems that acknowledge employee growth and commitment, reinforcing engagement and loyalty (Wr & Rusdi, 2025). However, the study also indicates that PDO's direct impact on ER was not statistically significant ($\beta = 0.095$), which might be due to the nature of professional development efforts that are perceived as valuable but do not immediately translate into retention without complementary engagement initiatives (Biswakarma & Subedi, 2025). This could suggest that while training enhances skills, without active engagement or supportive work environments, its effect on retention remains limited. Therefore, institutions should not view PDO purely as skill-building but as part of a broader strategy that encompasses fostering a positive, engaging, and supportive work climate. Emphasizing the integration of development opportunities with engagement initiatives will likely be more effective in reducing turnover rates and promoting long-term retention.

Theoretical Framework

This study significantly contributes to the theoretical advancement of both the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) and Social Exchange Theory (SET) (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005) by highlighting the central mediating role of employee engagement in the context of private higher education institutions. Aligning with the JD-R model, the findings reinforce the notion that job resources such as professional development opportunities and work-life balance serve as critical antecedents that bolster employee engagement, which in turn enhances retention. Notably, the study underscores that the influence of job resources on retention is primarily indirect, mediated through engagement, thus emphasizing the importance of a dynamic interaction where resources stimulate

motivation and reduce burnout, reinforcing the JD-R framework's focus on resource-driven engagement mechanisms. Simultaneously, the results extend SET by illustrating how organizational investments in development and flexibility function as Social Exchange processes, fostering reciprocal affective commitments. The significant positive effects of WLB and PDO on engagement suggest that organizations that invest in employee well-being and developmental support cultivate a sense of organizational support and trust, which promotes commitment and reduces turnover intentions. A new conceptual insight emerging from this research is the critical importance of engagement as a mediator that links resources to retention, providing a nuanced understanding that engagement is not just an outcome but a pivotal catalyst within these models. Future research could further refine these theories by exploring how individual differences, such as personal resilience or cultural factors, influence these mediating pathways, thus enriching the conceptual framework and its applicability across diverse organizational contexts.

Managerial Implications

The findings of this study offer valuable managerial implications for private higher education institutions aiming to improve employee retention through enhancing engagement. First, investing in professional development opportunities (PDO) is essential, as these significantly boost employee engagement, which directly influences retention. Institutions should design continuous learning programs, mentorship schemes, and career development pathways that align with employees' aspirations, fostering a culture of growth and commitment. Second, promoting work-life balance (WLB) through flexible working arrangements, family-friendly policies, and workload management can enhance engagement and reduce turnover, especially in a demanding academic environment. Managers should actively monitor and respond to staff needs, creating supportive work conditions. Third, since employee engagement acts as a mediating factor, managers must focus on strategies that foster emotional and psychological connection, such as recognition, participative decision-making, and transparent communication. Importantly, organizations should not rely solely on providing resources but also ensure these offerings are accessible and perceived as valuable by staff. Lastly, developing a supportive organizational climate that emphasizes mutual trust, support, and reciprocity can enhance social exchange relationships, further strengthening retention. By integrating these strategies, management can create an engaging work environment that not only attracts talented staff but also encourages long-term commitment, ultimately improving organizational stability and performance.

Suggestions for Future Studies

Future research could explore additional mediating and moderating variables, such as organizational culture, leadership style, and employee resilience, to better understand their influence on the relationships between professional development, work-life balance, engagement, and retention. Longitudinal studies would be valuable to examine how these relationships evolve, providing deeper insights into causal mechanisms. Investigating different organizational contexts, sectors, or cultural settings can also help to generalize the findings and uncover context-specific dynamics. Moreover, qualitative research can enrich understanding by capturing employees' perceptions and experiences related to development opportunities and work-life balance initiatives. Future studies might also explore the role of individual differences, such as personality traits or career stage, as moderators that impact engagement and retention outcomes. Finally, testing the effectiveness of various HR

interventions aimed at improving engagement and retention can offer practical guidance for organizations seeking evidence-based strategies to enhance employee well-being and organizational stability.

Conclusion

This study provides valuable insights into the vital role of professional development opportunities and work-life balance in fostering employee engagement and enhancing retention within private higher education institutions. The results confirm that both job resources significantly influence engagement, which acts as a key mediator in reducing turnover intentions. Emphasizing the importance of cultivating an engaging work environment, the findings suggest that strategic investments in employee development and flexible work arrangements can lead to substantial improvements in retention rates. Additionally, the research underscores the necessity for management to focus not only on resource provision but also on creating a supportive organizational climate that fosters trust and reciprocity. Theoretical contributions extend the understanding of the JD-R model and social exchange processes, highlighting engagement as a crucial link in this dynamic. Overall, the study offers practical guidance for higher education leaders aiming to retain talented staff and underscores the ongoing need to tailor HR strategies that prioritize employee well-being, development, and engagement to ensure organizational sustainability and success.

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