DETERMINANTS OF EMPLOYEE RETENTION IN PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES IN MALAWI: EXAMINING KNOWLEDGE SHARING AS A MODERATING FACTOR

Dennis Franscico Chandiona

Department of Business Administration, Exploits University, Malawi.
Chitawira Rd, Opposite Njamba Sec. School, Blantyre, Malawi

ABSTRACT

This study comprehensively investigates the determinants of employee retention in private universities in Malawi by examining the effects of talent management, task complexity, job satisfaction, and employee engagement. Recognizing the importance of human capital in higher education, the research also delves into the moderating influence of knowledge sharing on the relationship between employee engagement and employee retention. The study employs a quantitative research design, collecting data through structured questionnaires administered to 183 academic staff members across selected private universities. The data were analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) for preliminary analysis and Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) for hypothesis testing and model validation. Results show that employee engagement, talent management, and job satisfaction significantly enhance retention, while task complexity has no notable effect. Knowledge sharing positively moderates the engagement–retention relationship, emphasizing the value of a collaborative, knowledge-driven environment. The study contributes to human resource literature in higher education, especially within the Sub-Saharan African context. It also provides practical implications for university leaders and policymakers to improve staff retention by promoting engagement, knowledge sharing, and talent development. Future research may explore these relationships in public universities and assess other moderating variables.

KEYWORDS

Employee Retention, Job Satisfaction and Well-Being, Organizational Knowledge Exchange.

1. INTRODUCTION

Employee retention has emerged as a pivotal concern for organizations operating in today's dynamic and competitive environment, and private universities are no exception(Reward Gateway, 2023; Hammouri, & Altaher, 2020). These institutions rely heavily on skilled and committed personnel to sustain educational programs and ensure institutional productivity (Ali, Niu, & Rubel, 2024). Understanding the factors that influence employee retention is thus essential for the strategic management of human resources in higher education (AlQudah, Sierra-García & Garcia-Benau, 2023).

Research indicates that both personal and contextual factors affect employees' decisions to remain with or leave educational institutions. For instance, employees who are highly engaged and satisfied with their jobs are more inclined to stay (Mampuru et al., 2024). Effective talent management practices, including career development and performance management, have also been linked to increased employee loyalty and retention (Leontes, 2024). Talent management is a continuous process integral to organizational operations, contributing to enhanced productivity,

performance, and employee retention (Reward Gateway, 2023). It encompasses various practices such as recruitment, training, and succession planning, which collectively help in reducing turnover ratesa significant concern for educational institutions (Musakuro, 2022).

Employee engagement is another critical factor positively influencing academicians' intentions to remain with their institutions (Howard, Boudreaux & Oglesby, 2024). Engagement, characterized by enthusiasm and commitment to one's work, fosters a sense of belonging and alignment with organizational goals, thereby enhancing retention (Ndoro & Martins, 2019). Moreover, according to Alsharari, (2020), knowledge sharinga key component of knowledge management plays a vital role in strengthening employee retention. In the context of universities, knowledge sharing through seminars, workshops, mentoring programs, and informal interactions fosters a collaborative environment that supports academic staff retention and amplifies the effects of employee engagement (Enakrire & Smuts, 2022).

Despite the recognition of these factors, there is a paucity of studies examining the interplay between job-related elements such as task complexity, job satisfaction, and employee retention within the Malawian higher education context. This study aims to fill this research gap by investigating these relationships and the moderating role of knowledge sharing in private universities in Malawi.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

Employee retention is a critical aspect of human resource management, referring to an organization’s ability to keep its employees and reduce turnover (Marozva et al., 2024). High turnover rates not only disrupt organizational performance but also impose additional costs related to recruitment and training (Mampuru et al., 2024). Retention is influenced by multiple factors, including job satisfaction, engagement, task characteristics, and talent management strategies. The next section draws the literature and hypothesis development

2.1. Talent Management

Talent management encompasses strategic activities designed to attract, develop, and retain skilled employees, ensuring that organizations meet both current and future workforce needs (Moqbel, Bartelt, Topuz & Gehrt 2020). Key practices within talent management include career development programs, succession planning, and performance management systems, all of which are instrumental in enhancing employee retention (Lartey, 2021). Recent empirical studies underscore the positive impact of effective talent management on employee retention. For instance, Almashyakhi (2024) conducted a study within the Saudi Arabian government sector, revealing that comprehensive talent management practices significantly improve employee retention rates. The research emphasized the importance of identifying employees' unique skills and aligning them with appropriate career paths to foster long-term commitment.

Similarly, Alsakarneh et al. (2023) examined the influence of talent management practices specifically recruitment and selection, training and development, and rewards and compensation on employee retention within Jordanian service organizations. The study found that these practices positively correlate with employee retention, highlighting the necessity for organizations to implement structured talent management strategies to retain their workforce. These findings suggest that when employees perceive their talents are recognized and nurtured through deliberate organizational practices, they are more likely to remain with the organization. Therefore, it is hypothesized that:

H1: Talent management will positively affect employee retention.

2.2. Task Complexity

Task complexity refers to the degree of difficulty and intricacy involved in job tasks, encompassing factors such as the number of steps required, the variety of skills needed, and the unpredictability of task outcomes (Boon-Itt & Wong, 2021). High task complexity can lead to increased job stress and burnout, potentially resulting in higher turnover rates. Employees facing excessive cognitive load and unclear task structures often experience diminished job satisfaction, which negatively impacts retention (Ali et al., 2024).

In academic settings, faculty members frequently juggle multiple responsibilities, including teaching, research, and administrative duties, which can contribute to job strain. A study by AlQudah et al. (2023) examining employee retention in Jordanian universities found that task complexity had a non-significant relationship with retention, suggesting that other factors, such as engagement and talent management, may play a more critical role. However, in industries with high cognitive demands, such as IT and healthcare, task complexity has been linked to increased turnover intentions due to heightened stress levels and workload pressures (Shahzad et al., 2024). Organizations seeking to mitigate the negative effects of task complexity on retention can implement structured job design strategies, provide adequate training, and foster supportive work environments (Ndoro & Martins, 2019). By reducing ambiguity and offering clear task guidelines, employers can enhance job satisfaction and improve employee retention rates (Moqbel, Bartelt, Topuz & Gehrt, 2020). It is hypothesized that:

H2: Task complexity positively influences employee retention.

2.3. Job Satisfaction

Job satisfaction is a fundamental determinant of employee retention, shaping an individual's emotional, cognitive, and behavioral responses to their work environment (Hammouri & Altaher, 2020). It encompasses key factors such as organizational culture, leadership style, remuneration, career development opportunities, and job security (Mathur & Srivastava, 2024; Shahzad et al., 2024). Research of consistently Marozva, Barkhuizen & Mageza-Mokhethi, (2024) highlights that employees with high job satisfaction demonstrate stronger organizational commitment and reduced turnover intentions, ultimately fostering workforce stability and enhanced productivity. Recent empirical studies further reinforce this relationship. Bello et al. (2022) identify salary satisfaction as a primary driver of retention among IT professionals, emphasizing that competitive remuneration packages directly influence employees' long-term commitment. Moreover, AlQudah et al. (2023) assert that job satisfaction serves as a mediating variable in talent management frameworks, significantly improving employee engagement and lowering attrition rates across various sectors. Similarly, the Alsakarneh, Al-gharaibeh, Allozi, Ababneh & Eneizan, (2023) underscores that job satisfaction remains among the leading reasons employees choose to remain with their employers, highlighting the strategic importance of fostering a positive work environment to mitigate voluntary turnover.

Shahzad, Martins, Rita, Xu & Mushtaq, (2024) organizations that prioritize employee well-being through structured professional development, equitable compensation, and a supportive corporate culture are better positioned to retain top talent. Implementing targeted interventionssuch as personalized career growth programs and employee recognition initiativescan enhance job satisfaction and strengthen long-term retention strategies. It is hypothesised that:

H3: Job satisfaction positively influences employee retention.

2.4. Employee Engagement

Employee engagement has emerged as a critical determinant of knowledge sharing behavior within organizations (Ali et al., 2024). Defined as the emotional and cognitive commitment of employees toward their organization's goals, employee engagement significantly enhances the willingness of individuals to contribute to collective learning and performance (Al-Kurdi et al., 2020). Engaged employees are not only motivated to perform their tasks but also demonstrate a higher level of organizational citizenship behaviour, which includes voluntarily sharing their expertise and experiences with colleagues.

One of the fundamental reasons behind this positive relationship is that engaged employees tend to experience a deeper connection with their work environment, which fosters a sense of trust, psychological safety, and openness—key enablers of effective knowledge sharing (Tantawy et al., 2021). When employees are emotionally invested, they are more likely to view knowledge sharing not as a burden but as a valuable contribution to team and organizational success.

Moreover, employee engagement strengthens interpersonal relationships and communication within teams, thereby facilitating both tacit and explicit knowledge exchange xx. Nawaz et al. (2022) found that high levels of engagement among employees enhance collaboration and trust, which in turn significantly boosts the frequency and quality of knowledge sharing. Their study further highlights that engaged employees are more proactive and willing to participate in knowledge management practices, contributing to a learning-oriented organizational culture (Kumar et al., 2024).

Additionally, Enakrire & Smuts, (2022) engaged employees are more likely to take initiative, show resilience, and support their peers, especially in dynamic and knowledge-intensive environments. These behaviors are critical for the transfer of knowledge across departments and hierarchical levels. Engaged individuals often act as knowledge brokers, bridging gaps between teams and promoting innovative thinking through the dissemination of ideas (Tantawy et al., 2021).

Another important aspect according to Masood, (2024) is that employee engagement contributes to a sense of ownership and accountability, encouraging employees to support organizational learning and continuous improvement efforts. In this context, knowledge sharing becomes an integral part of daily routines and is perceived as a shared responsibility rather than an isolated task (Al-Kurdi et al., 2020). Employee engagement significantly influences knowledge sharing by fostering trust, collaboration, motivation, and proactive behaviour. Organizations that prioritize employee engagement are more likely to cultivate a culture where knowledge flows freely, ultimately enhancing innovation, productivity, and competitive advantage. Therefore, it is hypothesized:

H4: Employee engagement positively influences knowledge sharing.

2.5. Knowledge Sharing

Knowledge sharing involves the dissemination of information, skills, and expertise among employees, fostering a collaborative and informed work environment (Siew, Rosli & Yeow, 2020). Organizations that promote knowledge-sharing initiatives can enhance employee engagement and retention by creating a culture of continuous learning and professional development (Tamunomiebi & Worgu, 2020).

Recent studies highlight the positive impact of knowledge sharing on employee retention (Wiradendi Wolor, 2020). Hammouri and Altaher (2020) found that structured knowledge-sharing practices, such as seminars, workshops, and mentoring programs, significantly improve retention in academic institutions. Similarly, Džambić and Hadziahmetovic (2025) examined the IT sector and discovered that authentic leadership fosters knowledge-sharing behaviours, which in turn reduce employee turnover. Furthermore, Rahaman et al. (2025) emphasize that management support plays a crucial role in enhancing knowledge-sharing behaviours, ultimately strengthening employee commitment and reducing attrition rates.

A strong organizational learning culture that encourages knowledge sharing contributes to higher job satisfaction and lower turnover intentions. Companies that integrate knowledge-sharing mechanisms such as digital collaboration platforms, peer mentoring, and cross-functional training—can cultivate a more engaged workforce and improve long-term retention outcomes. It is hypothesized that:

H5: Knowledge Sharing Positively Influences Employee Retention

2.6. Knowledge Sharing as a Moderator

Knowledge sharing is widely recognized as a fundamental organizational practice, facilitating the exchange of insights, expertise, and experiences among employees. Traditionally perceived as an organic function of workplace interactions (Kossyva et al., 2023), knowledge sharing significantly enhances employee engagement and organizational effectiveness. However, within structured environments such as universities, deliberate efforts to foster a culture of knowledge exchange can play a pivotal role in improving academic staff retention (Work Institute. 2023).

In higher education institutions, faculty members frequently engage in collaborative research, interdisciplinary dialogues, and mentorship programs, all of which contribute to a dynamic and intellectually stimulating work environment (Alsakarneh, 2023). The presence of a well-integrated knowledge-sharing framework strengthens organizational commitment and fosters job satisfaction among academic staff. AlQudah et al. (2023) found that universities that actively promote knowledge-sharing initiatives, such as faculty development programs and peer collaboration platforms, report higher retention rates compared to institutions where knowledge remains siloed. When faculty members perceive their workplace as supportive and enriched by knowledge exchange, they are more likely to remain committed to their roles rather than seek external employment opportunities (Hammouri & Altaher, 2020). Beyond its direct impact on employee retention, knowledge sharing plays a crucial moderating role in the relationship between employee engagement and retention (Alsakarneh, Al-gharaibeh, Allozi, Ababneh & Eneizan, 2023). While engaged employees typically exhibit higher motivation and commitment, the reinforcement of a structured knowledge-sharing environment amplifies these effects. Mathur, and Srivastava, (2024),a workplace that actively facilitates knowledge-sharing opportunities strengthens employee bonds, enhances trust, and solidifies a sense of belonging, all of which contribute to retention (Obeid, 2022). Organizations that integrate digital collaboration tools, structured mentorship programs, and cross-functional learning initiatives tend to experience lower turnover rates and greater job satisfaction across various sectors (Marozva, Barkhuizen & Mageza-Mokhethi, 2024).

By fostering a culture of open knowledge exchange, employers can ensure that engaged employees remain committed to their organizations, leveraging shared expertise and collective learning to enhance workplace stability and performance. It is hypothetical that:

H6: Knowledge sharing positively moderates the relationship between employee engagement and employee retention.

3. The Research Conceptual Model

This study investigates the influence of five independent variablesnamely, talent management, task complexity, job satisfaction, employee engagement, and knowledge sharingon the dependent variable, employee retention. Additionally, it examines the moderating effect of knowledge sharing on the relationship between employee engagement and employee retention, as depicted in Figure 1 below.

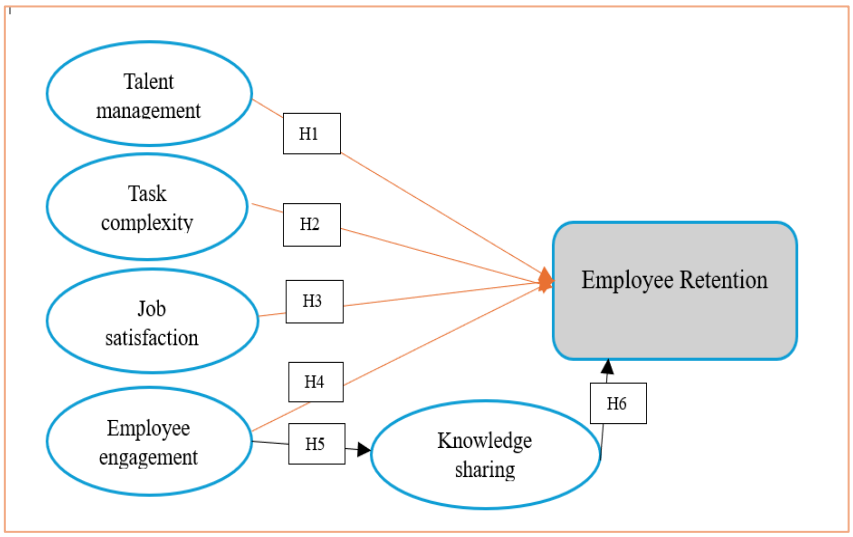

Figure 1: Conceptual model

Testing the interconnections among employee engagement, job satisfaction, task complexity, talent management, knowledge sharing, and employee retention contributes valuable insights, as these factors are closely interrelated and significantly affect a university's performance. Specifically, employee engagement and job satisfaction are intertwined, with engaged individuals more likely to be satisfied and committed. Task complexity influences both engagement and satisfaction by providing stimulating challenges. Talent management is essential for attracting and retaining top talent, thereby driving institutional performance and growth. Knowledge sharing fosters organizational learning, skill enhancement, and capacity building. Finally, employee retention is critical for maintaining organizational effectiveness, given the costs and disruptions caused by high turnover.

4. Methodology and Design

This study employed a quantitative research approach, aligning with contemporary methodological practices in business and management research. The target population comprised academic staff from private universities in Malawi. Recent estimates indicate that there are approximately 2,380 academic staff members across 18 private universities in the country.

To determine an appropriate sample size, the study referred to the widely accepted sample size determination table by Krejcie and Morgan (1970), which suggests a minimum sample of 248 for a population of approximately 2,380 individuals. Given that the sampling frame was known,

systematic random sampling was utilized to select participants. This method is recognized for its ability to produce representative samples and minimize selection bias.

Data collection was conducted using a structured questionnaire survey (details of the scales used are provided in Table 1). The survey was distributed to 190 academic staff members between January 5, 2024, and May 15, 2024, resulting in 183 valid responses. This corresponds to a response rate of approximately 73%, which is considered acceptable in organizational research contexts.

To address potential common method bias (CMB), several procedural and statistical remedies were implemented. Procedurally, data were collected in two waves, and respondents were assured of their anonymity to reduce social desirability bias. Additionally, questionnaire items were randomized to prevent pattern recognition that could influence responses. Statistically, Harman's single-factor test was conducted, revealing that a single factor accounted for only 39.14% of the variance, suggesting that CMB was not a significant concern in this study.

Table 1. Scales and authors adopted

Variable	Source	DOI / Link
Talent Management	Koranteng, A. (2014).	https://doi.org/10.4102/sajhrm.v12i1.561
Employee Retention	Kyndt, E., Dochy, F., Michielsen, M., & Moeyaert, B. (2009)..	https://doi.org/10.1007/s12186-009-9024-7
Employee Engagement	So, B.H., Kim, J.H., Ro, Y.J., & Song, J.H. (2022).	https://doi.org/10.1108/EJTD-11-2020-0155
Job Satisfaction	Ghasemy, M., Teeroovengadum, V., et al. (2022).	https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.8942177
Knowledge Sharing	Al-Kurdi, O.F., El-Haddadeh, R., & Eldabi, T. (2020).	https://doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2023.100573
Task Complexity	Sanajou, M., Ghonsooly, B., & Assemi, A. (2017).	https://doi.org/10.7575/aiac.ijalel.v.6n.6p.71

4.1. Development of Questionnaire Measurement

4.1.1. Item Generation

The development of the measurement scale adhered to the systematic approach outlined by Fornell & Larcker, (2020), encompassing several key stages. Initially, the construct of interest employee engagement was clearly defined based on an integrated theoretical framework derived from a comprehensive literature review. Subsequently, an item pool was generated to capture the multifaceted nature of the construct. The format of the questionnaire, including the type of scale and response options, was determined to ensure suitability for the target population.

4.1.2. Content Validity

To assess content validity, a panel of subject matter experts evaluated the relevance and clarity of each item. The Item-Level Content Validity Index (I-CVI) was calculated, with values equal to or greater than 0.78 indicating acceptable content validity (Hair, Hult, Ringle, Sarstedt & Danks, 2021). This process ensured that each item adequately represented the construct of interest.

4.1.3. Construct Validity and Reliability

A pilot study was conducted with a sample of 30 participants to evaluate the construct validity and reliability of the scale. Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was performed using Principal Component Analysis (PCA) with Varimax rotation to identify the underlying factor structure (Alamer, 2022). Subsequently, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was conducted to validate the factor structure identified in the EFA. Model fit indices such as the Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI), and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) were used to assess the adequacy of the model. Reliability was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha, with values above 0.70 indicating acceptable internal consistency (Fornell & Larcker, 2020).

4.1.4. Measurement Invariance

To ensure the scale's applicability across different groups, measurement invariance was tested using multi-group CFA. This analysis examined whether the scale measured the construct equivalently across subgroups, such as gender and employment status (Hair, Hult, Ringle, Sarstedt & Danks, 2021).

5. DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

The study utilized Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) for preliminary data analysis, including data coding and descriptive statistics. For hypothesis testing and structural model evaluation, SmartPLS 4 was employed, aligning with contemporary practices in social science research (Alamer, 2022). Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) was chosen due to its suitability for exploratory research, especially when the primary objective is to predict and explain variance in endogenous constructs (Bell, Harley & Bryman, 2022). This method is particularly advantageous when dealing with complex models, small sample sizes, and non-normal data distributions.

The selection of PLS-SEM also facilitates the analysis of both reflective and formative measurement models, providing a comprehensive understanding of the relationships between latent variables (Bell, Harley & Bryman, 2022). Furthermore, the use of SmartPLS 4 offers advanced features such as bootstrapping, blindfolding, and predictive relevance assessments, enhancing the robustness of the findings

Table 2 presents the demographic characteristics of the respondents, providing context for the subsequent analysis.

Table 2.Demographic information of respondents.

Variable	Grouping	Frequency	(%)
Gender	Female	72	39.3
	Male	111	60.7
Age	less than 35	18	9.8
	35–44	33	18.0
	45–54	49	26.8
	55 and above	83	45.4
Experience	less than 5 years	8	4.4
	5–9 years	24	13.1
	10–14 years	29	15.8
	15–19 years	87	47.5
	20 years and above	35	19.1

As presented in Table 2, the respondent profile reveals that most participants were male, comprising 60.7% of the sample. Regarding age distribution, the largest group of respondents fell into the "55 and above" category (45.4%), followed by those aged "45–54 years" (26.8%), "35–44 years" (18%), and "less than 35 years" (9.8%). In terms of work experience, nearly half of the participants (47.5%) reported having 15–19 years of professional experience, while 19.1% had more than 20 years of experience. Additionally, 15.8% had accumulated 10-14 years of experience, and a smaller proportion (4.4%) reported having less than 5 years of experience.

Understanding the central tendency of respondents' perceptions is crucial for interpreting the data effectively (Alqudah et al., 2021; Hair et al., 2021; Kock, 2022). Thus, as detailed in Table 3, the study ranked the scales by their mean scores (from highest to lowest), highlighting which variables were perceived most strongly by respondents. Notably, employee retention achieved the highest mean score (M = 3.70, SD = 0.597), indicating that this aspect was most positively perceived or experienced by participants. Following this, the mean and standard deviations for the remaining variables were as follows: employee engagement (M = 3.42, SD = 0.518), job satisfaction (M = 3.31, SD = 0.631), knowledge sharing (M = 3.26, SD = 0.678), talent management (M = 3.19, SD = 0.787), and finally, task complexity, which had the lowest mean score (M = 2.26, SD = 0.677).

These findings provide valuable insights into the perceived strengths and challenges faced by the surveyed academic staff, emphasizing the need to focus on factors such as task complexity to improve organizational performance and employee well-being.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics of the study variables

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	Rank
Employee retention	3.70	.597	1
Employee Engagement	3.42	.518	2
Job Satisfaction	3.31	.631	3
Talent Management	3.19	.787	4
Task Complexity	2.29	.677	5
knowledge Sharing	3.26	.678	6
Valid N (listwise)			

For exploratory analysis, item loadings were examined, as detailed in Table 2. Items TC4 and TC7 from the Task Complexity scale, along with KS2 and KS3 from the Knowledge Sharing scale, exhibited insufficient factor loadings and were therefore excluded from subsequent analysis (Hair et al., 2021; Kock, 2022). These findings aligned with the assessment of discriminant validity, which demonstrated that each item loaded more strongly on its intended construct than on other constructs within the model (Hair et al., 2021).

Following this, both the measurement model and the structural model were analyzed (Hair et al., 2021; Kock, 2022). Table 4 presents the convergent validity results, showing that all items met the established reliability and validity thresholds. Specifically, Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability (CR), and item loadings for all constructs exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70, and the average variance extracted (AVE) for all variables surpassed the 0.50 criterion, providing solid evidence of convergent validity (Hair et al., 2021; Fornell & Larcker, 2020).

The study also evaluated discriminant validity to confirm the distinctiveness of each construct. Table 5 summarizes the results from the Fornell-Larcker criterion analysis, revealing that the square root of AVE for each construct was higher than its correlations with other constructs, satisfying the requirements for discriminant validity (Fornell & Larcker, 2020; Hair et al., 2021).

Table 4**.** Mean, indicators reliability, VIF, CR, Cronbach's α, CV (after deletion)

Constructs	Items name	Items loading	VIF	CR	Cronbach's α	AVE
Talent Management (TM)	TM1	.695	1.502	.79	.88	.51
	TM2	.741	1.611			
	TM3	.772	1.703			
	TM4	.733	1.422			
	TM5	.779	1.542			
Task Complexity (TC)	TC1	.665	2.054	.86	.82	53
	TC2	.711	1.367			
	TC3	.722	1.452			
	TC5	.753	1.317			
	TC6	.749	1.648			
	TC8	.727	1.567			
Job Satisfaction (JS)	JS1	.626	1.244	.85	.777	.53
	JS2	.713	1.423			
	JS3	.75	1.702			
Employee Engagement (EE)	EE1	.737	1.301	.83	.746	.57
	EE2	.751	1.267			
	EE3	.731	1.252			
	EE4	.756	1.917			
	EE5	.732	1.548			
Knowledge Sharing (KS)	KS 1	.675	1.416	.87	.82	.53
	TMS 2	.721	1.563			
	TMS 3	.732	1.49			
	TMS 4	.763	1.712			
	TMS 5	.739	1.664			
	TMS 6	.717	1.538			
Employee Retention (ER)	ER1	.736	2.029	.918	.906	.53
	ER2	.667	1.329			
	ER3	.713	2.186			

In the Table 5 of discriminant validity above, extent to which a measurement tool or construct is distinct from other theoretically unrelated constructs. It ensures that variables intended to measure different concepts do not exhibit excessive correlation, thereby confirming that each construct captures unique aspects of the phenomenon under investigation (Hubley & Zumbo, 2023).In research, discriminant validity is often assessed alongside convergent validity, which examines whether measures of theoretically related constructs are indeed correlated. Together, these validity checks strengthen the construct validity of a measurement model, ensuring that it accurately differentiates between distinct theoretical concepts (Rönkkö & Cho, 2022). Below Table 6 is the analysis of the structural model

Table 5.The analysis of the structural model

Constructs	TM	KS	JS	ER	TC	EE
Talent Management (TM)	.73					
Knowledge Sharing (KS)	.51	.71				
Job Satisfaction (JS)	.06	.02	1			
Employee Retention (ER)	.59	.62	.08	.71		
Task Complexity (TC)	.46	.55	−.07	.59	.71	
EmployeeEngagement (EE)	.41	.36	.05	.58	.32	.73

The analysis of the structural model, summarized in Table 6, presents the results of the hypothesis testing conducted in this study. The findings reveal that most of the independent variables demonstrate a significant positive influence on employee retention. Specifically, talent management (H1: $\beta = 0.242$, $p < 0.01$), job satisfaction (H3: $\beta = 0.321$, $p < 0.01$), employee engagement (H4: $\beta = 0.321$, $p < 0.01$), and knowledge sharing (H5: $\beta = 0.254$, $p < 0.01$) each exert a statistically significant and positive effect on employee retention outcomes.

These results suggest that higher levels of engagement, satisfaction, talent management effectiveness, and knowledge sharing are associated with increased intentions of employees to remain with their organizations. This aligns with recent findings emphasizing the critical role of these factors in shaping retention strategies within academic institutions and corporate settings (Hair et al., 2021; Alqudah et al., 2023).

However, the analysis revealed that task complexity (H2: $\beta = 0.071$, $p > 0.01$) did not show a significant influence on employee retention, suggesting that the perceived complexity of tasks may not directly affect employees' decisions to stay or leave. This result highlights the importance of focusing on positive organizational drivers rather than job design challenges in retention strategies (Kock, 2022).

The structural relationships are visually represented in Figure 3, while detailed statistical values are displayed in Table 7.

Table 6. Structural relationships

Hypothesis testing	Path coefficient	T statistics	p-values	Result
H1: TM -> ER	.242	3.93	.001**	Supported
H2: TC -> ER	.071	.973	.168	Not supported
H3: JS -> ER	.220	3.37	.002**	Supported
H5: KS -> ER	.254	4.37	.000**	Supported
H6: EE -> ER	.321	3.86	.000**	Supported

Regarding the moderating effect, we examined the interaction between knowledge sharing and employee engagement in influencing employee retention. Specifically, we calculated the interaction term of employee engagement and knowledge sharing (H6) and found it to be statistically significant (t-value = 2.286, $p < 0.05$), as depicted in Figure 3. This finding suggests that knowledge sharing amplifies the positive relationship between employee engagement and employee retention. In other words, when employees engage in higher levels of knowledge sharing, the beneficial impact of employee engagement on retention becomes significantly stronger. Conversely, when knowledge sharing is low, the positive influence of employee engagement on retention is weakened. This interaction is visually represented in Figure 2, which illustrates how the relationship between employee engagement and retention varies at different levels of knowledge sharing.Below is Figure 3**.** Research model with significant findings.

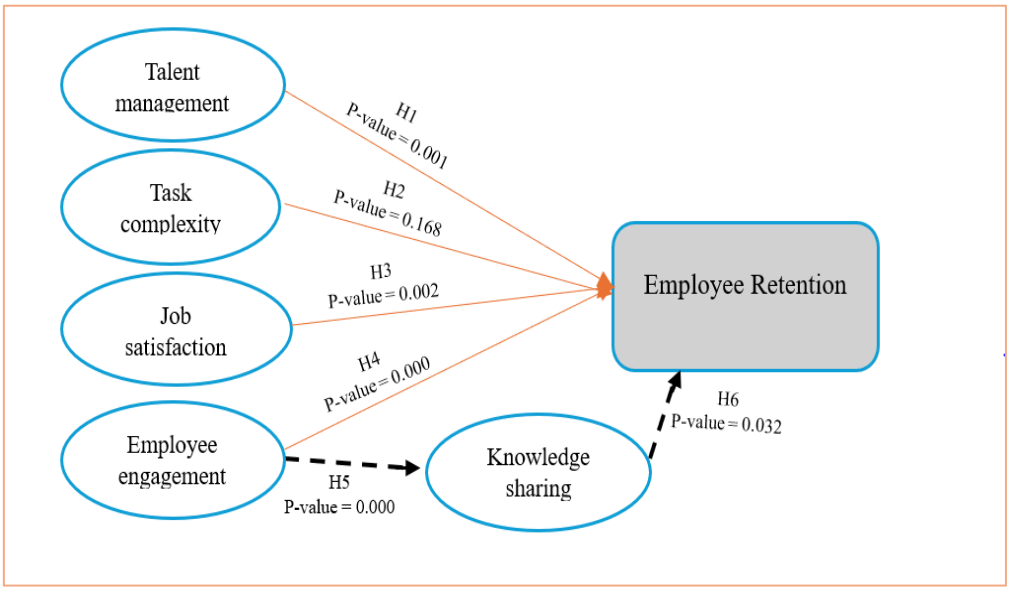

Figure 2**.** Research model with significant findings.

Table 7 illustrates below the proportion of variance accounted for by the variables in Model 1, demonstrating a moderate predictive strength in forecasting employee retention, with an R^2 value of 0.52. According to Hair et al. (2020), the interpretation of R^2 values follows a structured classification:

- 0.25 indicates a weak explanatory power,
- 0.50 represents a moderate level of variance explanation, and
- 0.75 or higher signifies a substantial predictive capability.

Given that the R^2 value in this model falls within the moderate range, it suggests that the independent variables collectively provide a reasonable degree of explanatory power regarding employee retention. However, while the model demonstrates statistical relevance, additional factors—such as external influences, organizational dynamics, and individual employee characteristics—may further contribute to retention outcomes.

This classification framework aids in assessing the robustness of the model, ensuring that its predictive validity aligns with established statistical benchmarks. The distinction between direct and indirect effects within the model further refines the understanding of how various factors interact to shape employee retention trends.

Table 7. Illustration of proportion of variance

Model	**R^2**
Model 1. direct effect	.52
Model 1. direct effect	.536

The R^2 value observed in this study aligns with benchmarks established in management research utilizing PLS-SEM, demonstrating an appropriate level of explanatory power. Furthermore, incorporating the interaction effect led to an increase in the R^2 value from 0.52 to 0.536, indicating a slight improvement in the model's predictive capability.

To assess the significance of this interaction effect, Cohen's (1988) effect size formula was applied:

[f2_ {\text{interaction model}} - R2)}]
Using this formula, the computed f^2 value for the interaction effect was 0.033 [(0.536 - 0.52) / (1 - 0.52) = 0.033]. According to Cohen's classification, this effect size falls within the small range, suggesting that while the interaction effect contributes to the model's explanatory power, its overall impact remains modest.

6. DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Employee retention has been extensively studied in developed economies, yet there remains a notable gap in research focusing on developing nations, particularly within the private university sector. Despite its significance, limited scholarly attention has been given to understanding the specific factors influencing academic staff retention in these contexts. This study provides a unique contribution by identifying task complexity as a distinct factor potentially affecting faculty retention. Additionally, it introduces knowledge sharing as a moderating variable, amplifying the positive effects of employee engagement on retention. Overall, this research highlights key drivers of academic staff retention in Malawian private universities.

Findings from this study indicate that four critical factors namely employee engagement, job satisfaction, talent management, and knowledge sharingserve as significant predictors of employee retention in private universities in Malawi. Institutions characterized by higher levels of employee engagement tend to experience greater retention rates, aligning with Ali et al. (2024), who found that engaged employees exhibit stronger organizational commitment and are less likely to seek alternative employment. Moreover, this study emphasizes the role of job satisfaction as an essential determinant of retention, reinforcing prior research by Masood (2024), which underscores the importance of workplace satisfaction in shaping employee tenure within academic institutions.

Additionally, the study explores the relationship between talent management and employee retention, demonstrating that universities with well-structured talent development frameworks can effectively sustain a skilled workforce (Zamri & Halim, 2024). This finding is consistent with the arguments of Kumar et al. (2024), who assert that talent management plays a crucial role in optimizing institutional workforce structures. Furthermore, this research affirms the positive impact of knowledge sharing on employee retention, supporting Nallaluthan, Kamaruddin, Thurasamy, Ghouri & Kanapathy, (2024), who highlight the significance of knowledge exchange in fostering organizational stability. Studies by Wiradendi Wolor, (2020) further validate this notion, suggesting that knowledge-sharing practices enhance employee commitment and mitigate turnover intentions.

Interestingly, the study did not find evidence supporting the hypothesized link between task complexity and employee retention. This outcome contrasts with previous studies that suggest complex work tasks significantly influence employee behavior (Huang et al., 2008; Siew et al., 2020; Alqudah et al., 2019). While task complexity may contribute to workplace strain, its direct effect on academic staff retention requires further exploration. Future research should investigate the nuanced interplay between task complexity and retention, particularly within academic institutions, to determine whether sector-specific factors shape this relationship.

This study contributes to the field of knowledge by providing empirical evidence on the antecedents of academic staff retention in Malawian private universities. Additionally, it presents a novel perspective by introducing knowledge sharing as a moderator of the employee engagement-retention relationship. Beyond advancing theoretical perspectives, this research offers foundational insights for future studies exploring the determinants of employee retention in academic settings.

Moreover, this study refines existing theoretical frameworks by providing empirical validation for the predictive relationships between the examined variables. A key contribution of this research is its contextual focus, considering geographical and cultural influences on employee retention. By integrating insights from workplace engagement, talent development, task complexity, job satisfaction, and knowledge-sharing dynamics, this study offers valuable recommendations for institutional decision-making.

From a practical standpoint, the findings offer strategic guidance for Malawian private universities to evaluate employee characteristics and retention drivers. Understanding these factors will enable institutions to identify the primary causes of faculty turnover while implementing targeted initiatives to improve employee satisfaction and professional development. Future research could build on these findings by further examining talent management strategies, with a specific focus on how they shape long-term retention outcomes within academia.

7. DIRECTION FOR FUTURE STUDIES

This study provides insights into employee retention in Malawian private universities, with a focus on the moderating role of knowledge sharing. However, several areas remain open for future research.

Firstly, future studies could expand the scope to include public universities or other sectors to compare retention dynamics across institutional types. A longitudinal design is also recommended to better understand how retention factors evolve over time.

Researchers may consider adopting a mixed-methods approach to capture both statistical trends and deeper personal experiences. Additionally, examining other moderating or mediating factors such as organizational culture, leadership style, or psychological empowerment could offer broader insights.

Given the rise of digital tools, future research might explore the impact of technology and remote work on employee retention in higher education. It would also be beneficial to analyze how demographic factors influence retention, allowing institutions to tailor strategies for specific employee groups.

Lastly, cross-cultural or regional studies within Southern Africa could help validate and generalize the findings beyond the Malawian context.

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AUTHOR

Dennis Franscico Chandiona is the Head of the Department of Business Administration and a senior lecturer in the Faculty of Commerce at Exploits University. He is currently pursuing PhD in Business Science at the University of Cape Town, South Africa. His research interests include consumer behaviour, total quality management, , strategic marketing management, and digital marketing.