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Turnover Intention among Academics: A Case Study of Private Higher Learning Education in Klang Valley

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ABSTRACT

Academics are seen as guardians of knowledge, disseminators of knowledge and creators of new knowledge. However, due to the expectation of Malaysia to be a regional hub for international higher education, it consequently burdens the academics especially in private higher learning education. Stress occurs among academics and stimulates them to leave. This situation is dangerous as it impacts on the institution and the student itself directly and indirectly. Therefore, this study attempts to investigate turnover intention from the perspective of job demand, job control and social support. 201 academics from private HLE were participated in this research and the empirical tests revealed that job control determine the level of turnover intention as well as social support on turnover intention. The regression estimation shows that social support was significantly reflected in turnover intention among academics.

Keywords: Turnover intention, private HLE, academics, job demand, job control, social support

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INTRODUCTION

In today's context, knowledge-based economy is viewed as a crucial contributor to the nation's economic growth and wealth creation. To succeed in this rapid development environment, it is vital for the nation to discover knowledge, generate new ideas and encourage innovation especially among the undergraduates who are potential leaders for the future. However, the growth

and wealth is dependent on the capability and capacity of the nation in developing and applying new technologies. Therefore, to achieve it, starting in the middle of 1990's, the government of Malaysia urged the higher learning education (HLE) to generate a pool of well-educated and skilled professionals as a preparation for economic growth and sustain (Sohail & Saeed, 2002).

There are two types of entities of HLE in Malaysia, which are public and private. Public HLE is partly subsidized by the government while private HLE typically owned by private organization and most are profit oriented. However, the mission of both HLE is still the same, ultimately to produce a good quality of graduates which beneficial the nation. Moreover, derived from the theory of resource, the process of learning and personal development of the graduates is depending to the amount of ratio of student-academics (Astin, 1984). The person who becomes the backbone of the mission is pointed to the academics, who are responsible as guardians of current knowledge, disseminators of knowledge and creators of new knowledge (Maimunah & Lawrence, 2007).

Due to the liberalization, deregulation and privatization of HLE, have resulted a very dynamic and rapid expansion, such as innovative educational programs and changing educational policies. The sudden changes plus the target to be regional hub for international higher education tend to stimulate stress to the HLE's employee especially the academics. Suffered with the limitation of capacity and capability

compared to public HLE, it is prone to get caught in serious crisis of enrollment and financial. Therefore, to get off from the stress, academics are willing to leave their current job and looking forward for a new job (Karasek, 1997; Mohd Kamel, 2009).

In addition, besides focusing on teaching, academics are also responsible to participate actively in research work and innovation as well as community services. With such demands placed on the shoulder, academics need to deliver their core duties plus being responsible for non-academic work such as marketing and administrative work (Azman *et al.*, 2010). Thus, these stimulate stress among academics and the consequences of stress then lead to cynicism towards work, poor organizational commitment, low job satisfaction (Taris *et al.*, 2001) and finally induce the sense of turnover.

This study attempts to investigate whether job demand, job control and social support determine turnover intention among academics especially in private HLE. It is viewed that turnover intention among academics could result in negative consequences to the institution and student itself (Ehrenberg *et al.*, 1990). Researches in private HLE particularly on turnover intention are very limited. Thus, the needs of understanding the factors that lead to turnover intention among academics are crucial and necessary in improving institution performance and producing competent human capital for the nation.

Turnover Intention

Intent to stay or to leave the organization can be classified as a final stage in the psychological decision-making process of a person before leaving (Mobley, 1977). It describes as forerunner to actual turnover behavior in many turnover models. In addition according to few theorists, they portrayed that turnover intention as the most substantial predictor of actual turnover (Mobley, 1982; Mowday *et al.*, 1982; Smart, 1990; Steers & Mowday, 1981; Vandenberg & Scarpello, 1990).

Employee turnover can be an unfortunate and costly aspect of human resource management in most organizations. In classic studies, it showed that most of turnovers typically will results negative consequences (Mobley *et al.*, 1979). Therefore, the consequences faced by organizations in employee turnover can be divided into two aspects which comprise direct cost and indirect cost. According to Wood and Macaulay (1989), direct cost is the organizations consumption of time and money in finding, hiring and training new employees. While for indirect cost, it occurred during the process of finding new employees that the organizations experience declining productivity especially in service caused by understaffing and also by the inexperience of new employees.

In the context of HLE, the investment on searching and hiring process by universities can be considered as high, however, the return is rather poor compared with earlier investment. It depicts that the institution is not capable to get a positive return from the

investment on faculty member's promotion, training and sabbatical leave and it also ruins the aim in gaining and sustaining a quality of human capital and workforce. Aligned with Bowen and Schuster (1986), which stated that "The excellence of higher education is a function of the kind of people it is able to enlist and retain on its faculty". The problem of academic staff turnover or is also termed, "Brain Drain", still continues in our Malaysian local universities (Khoo, 1981).

However, turnover can also be seen as movements of labor in and out and able to generate income for economy growth for both organization and individual. Indeed, it provides new opportunity in vacancy, knowledge and skills transferred from one organization to another by both parties. In facts, as suggested by Mobley (1982), turnover phenomenon is able to stimulate positive changes through creation the promotion opportunities, reorganization and restructuring. While in individual perspective, the decision to quit is positively associated with individual's career objectives, or with the movement away from a stressful situation. It is supported by the studies done in Japan (Yadori & Kato, 2007) and United States (Kacmar *et al.*, 2006; Shaw *et al.*, 2005) which stated that the voluntary turnover ratio has negatively related to labor productivity.

In the academic context, turnover among academics can be considered as a natural part of professional advancement. In Brown's (1967) study, the author suggested that the mobility of academics is accepted and approved by the profession "because

loyalty to discipline transcends loyalty to school and because teaching and research skills are readily transferable among schools". Moreover, human capital theorists also believed that personal endowment such as ability and education could translate into returns in the marketplace.

Job Demand

Job demands is defined as job that associates with physical, psychological, social, or organizational features that require an effort from the physical and/or psychological from an employee (Bakker *et al.*, 2003; Bakker *et al.*, 2005). To meet the expectation of the organization, the employee must perform accordingly to the objective and goal as well as pursue the needs of the job. However, pursuing career in an established organization correlates negatively to turnover intention (Latif & Grillo, 2001). In other words, job demand is not harmful in itself.

Heavy workloads, large number students to teach, may generate hostility towards the organization and diminish levels of academics commitment to the organization. Xu (2008) found that those academics who spent too much time in research and committee work, tend to leave. Winefield (2000) proved in his meta-analysis that those academics with high level of stress were associated with high level of workloads and low level of rewards. In empirical study on workload, past researches indicated that workload is one of the most stressful aspects of academics careers (Barnes *et al.*, 1998; Witt & Lovrich, 1998).

Job Control

Job control is defined as the ability of employees to set organizational goals and to structure the organization to maximize professional concerns (Price, 1997). In details, it is a freedom of academics in choosing and pursuing one's own agenda and being trusted to manage the pattern one's own working life and priorities (Henkel, 2005). Moreover, freedom is a function of academic control of the professional arena of teaching and research and is viewed as a necessary condition for work and identity. Turner and Lawrence (1965) found that autonomous in work may satisfy higher-order needs for achievement and accomplishment, which in turn generate positive regard for the employing organization and higher levels of intent to stay.

Meanwhile, skill discretion is the degree of creative and skill that employee could implement it in performing well in job. Florida and Goodnight highlighted that the creative person as "... an arsenal of creative thinkers whose ideas can be turned into valuable products and services" (2005). Therefore, freedom in implementing the academic task such as teaching, administrative and research with creative execution will lead to the satisfaction and subsequently decrease turnover intention. It leads to the feeling of appreciation from organization regarding the skills which cultivate an eager and interesting attitude in acquiring new skills and experiences in order to take new and more challenging position (Moore, 1983; Moore & Twombly

1990; Sagaria & Hohnsrud, 1992; Scott, 1978).

Social Support

Social support is viewed as stress and strain aid. Thoits (1983) stated that the availability of support from colleagues provides individuals with positive feelings, such as a sense of self-worth and confidence that help them to avoid negative experiences. In academia, Neumann and Finaly-Neumann (1990) found that support from colleagues and supervisors able to make research work easier among faculty, which increase research performance. Moreover, it is importance to create a supportive thinking environment with colleagues concerning other academics issues (Van Staden *et al.*, 2001). For examples, research assistants, co-authors and students were considered as significant sources of motivation to remain firm during difficult times.

However, although social support has proved its roles in handling stress, past literature has shown that academics report not receiving enough support from their colleagues. For instance, in a recent study on satisfaction among academics and administrative staff in Turkish universities, Kusku (2003) disclosed that most of the academics were not content with their colleagues with respect to cooperation and interest in their academic activities. This situation portrayed that each of the academics were experiencing perceived competition from each of their colleagues instead of cooperation.

METHODOLOGY

Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework for this study were derived from the previous literature review on occupational contents which were named as job demand, job control and social support towards turnover intention as proposed by Durrishah *et al.* (2009). The model for this study, which is a conceptual framework of linking job demand, job control, social support and turnover intention, will be presented (see Fig.1) and 3 hypotheses were developed in order to test the conceptual framework as stated below:

Hypothesis 1: There is a relationship between job demand and turnover intention.

Hypothesis 2: There is a relationship between job control and turnover intention.

Hypothesis 3: There is a relationship between social support and turnover intention.

Procedures

This study mainly employed the quantitative method in order to probe and understand the turnover intention among academics in the private HLE. Generally, in quantitative research, the common type approaches is self-report survey (Shaughnessy & Zechmeister, 1997). The primary data collection was through the distribution of a survey questionnaire to the sample particularly from private HLEs in Klang Valley.

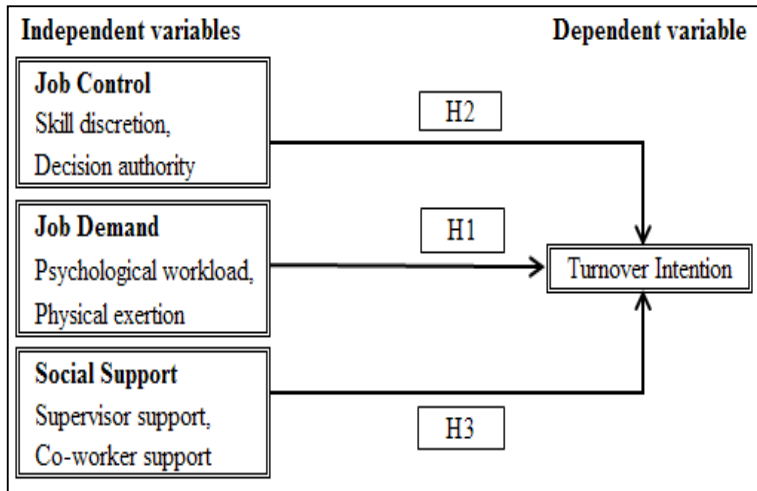


Fig. 1: Research Framework: Job Demand, Job Control, Social Support and Turnover Intention

Population and Sampling

A list of private HLEs was obtained from the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE). Based on the year of 2011, there are 242 of private HLE in the Klang Valley (Selangor and Kuala Lumpur). The targetted population for this present study were academics who work in private institution of higher learning in Selangor and Kuala Lumpur.

A simple random sampling procedure was adopted to determine an appropriate sample for the study. Sekaran (2000) suggested simple random sampling offers great generalizability and has the least bias. Based on MOHE, there are 14,199 numbers of academics which been employed in private university and college university and according to Krejcie and Morgan (1970) and Cohen (1969), when the population of sample more 10,000 and capped at 15,000, the appropriate number of sample size are 375. However, to minimize the sample error, the sample number was up to 400.

400 questionnaires were distributed to the respective respondent via email. A total of 215 academics responded to the questionnaire. The overall response rate was 53.75% and it is more than minimum rate which are 30% and is considered as acceptable (Sekaran, 2003). However, only 196 questionnaires were valid to use after deleting 19 set of questionnaires with missing data.

The Instrument and Measurement

For independent variables, all 31 questions for job demand, job control and social support were adopted from Job Content Questionnaire (JCQ) developed by Karasek (1985) while for dependent variable, the instrument was adopted from O’Driscoll and Beehr’s, (1994) and it consists of three questions.

In Part 1, seven sections covered 34 questions which are skill discretion and decision authority (9 questions),

psychological workload and physical exertion (14 questions) supervisor and co-worker support (8 questions) and turnover intention (3 questions). Meanwhile, in Part 2, seven questions on demographic information of participants. These demographic variables were treated as control variables in this study. Six-point Likert scale will be use for each variable in the questionnaire which anchors being (1) strongly disagree to (6) strongly agree. Therefore, for the variables, the higher score for variables indicating higher job demand, higher job control, higher social support and higher turnover intention.

Reliability and Validity Analysis

Cronbach's Alpha test was employed in this study and according to Sekaran (2003), it is a reliability coefficient test that points out how well the items in a set which are positively correlated to one another. To consider the variables as reliable, the Cronbach's Alpha value was set to 0.7 and above (Pallant, 2001).

In job demand, for overall 14 questions, the reliability analysis is 0.691. To imply a relatively high internal consistency, item number four in psychological workload was deleted and the reliability have slightly improved to 0.716. While in job control, nine items showed internal consistency at 0.645. Therefore, the researcher decided to exclude item number eight and reliability slightly improved to 0.737. For social support, it showed at 0.869 and all eight items in social support exhibits internal consistency and reliability. Meanwhile,

the dependent variable was represented the value of reliability at 0.915.

An exploratory factor analysis (EFA) with Varimax rotation was conducted on the items from independent and dependent variable. This study adopted the convention advocated by Nunnally (1978) which stated that factors are generally named based on loading greater than or equal to 0.4. Hence, by using this criterion, only items with factor loadings of at least 0.4 were retained.

Two items with factor loadings below 0.4 were identified in job control and social support. However, previously in reliability test, two items which from job demand and job control were already removed in order to achieve higher internal consistency and removal of any additional questions from the tool would result in loss of valuable information that are significant to this study. A Varimax rotated analysis suggested that existence of three significant factors with Eigenvalues greater than one which explained 58.637% of the total variance. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy was at 0.766, which greater than a minimum acceptance value of 0.5. The Bartlett Test of Sphericity showed at Chi Square value of 3056.566 with the significant level lesser than 0.001. Therefore, these three factors were named Job Demand (thirteen items), Job Control (eight items) and Social Support (eight items) are seemed tolerable to represent the independent variables.

While for turnover intention, a single factor solution with Eigenvalues of 2.575 which is explaining 85.833% of the variance

has emerged. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy was 0.723 whereby Bartlett’s Test of Sphericity was significant with Chi Square value of 457.429 with the significant value stands lesser than 0.01. Therefore, this single factor is named as turnover intention.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Descriptive Analysis

According to Table 1, there were moderate job demand which were represented by calculated mean at 3.33 and standard deviation at 0.67. While for job control, the calculated mean and standard deviation showed at 4.91 and 0.65. These showed that academics experienced high level of job control. For social support, the level was high which was represented by mean and standard deviation at 4.49 and 0.87. As for turnover intention, the level is moderate which mean and standard deviation at 2.64 and 1.56.

TABLE 1
Mean and standard deviations for each independent and dependent variable

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation
Independent		
Job Demand	3.33	0.67
Job Control	4.91	0.65
Social Support	4.49	0.87
Dependent		
Turnover Intention	2.64	1.56

TABLE 2
Summary of correlation between independent and dependent variable

Variable	1	2	3	4
1. Turnover Intention	--			
2. Job Demand	0.083	--		
3. Job Control	-0.175	0.217**	--	
4. Social Support	-0.275**	0.065	0.443**	--

Note: **Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

Hypotheses Testing

Hypotheses were tested using the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation. In line with conservative approach, two-tailed test of significance set at 0.05 level was used although if the hypothesized relationship is directional (Polit & Beck, 2004). Table 2 showed the summary of correlations between independent variables and dependent variable.

Hypothesis 1

The results indicated that $p = 0.242$ and $r = 0.083$. Since p-value is bigger than 0.05, it is showed that the results was fail to reject the null hypothesis. Therefore, there is no significant relationship between job demand and turnover intention. The findings is align with research done by Latif and Grillo (2001) which stated that job demand is not harmful especially when pursuing in established organization particularly in HLEs in Malaysia. On the other hand,

the results is contrary with past researches which stated job demand will lead to stress which eventually lead them to stimulate turnover intention (Barnes *et al.*, 1998; Witt & Lovrich, 1998; Winefield, 2000; Taris *et al.*, 2001; Xu, 2008; Azman *et al.*, 2010).

Hypothesis 2

The results was stated that $p < 0.05$ and $r = -0.175$. Since p-value was lesser than 0.05, the null hypothesis were rejected. Therefore, there is a significant relationship between job control and turnover intention. Meanwhile, the magnitude of the correlation is almost negligible relationship (Guilford, 1956) and the directional is negative which is when academics perceived high job control, it lead to eliminate the turnover intention. This result depicted that job control experienced by academics in private HLEs towards turnover intention are align with previous researches done by Turner and Lawrence (1965).

Hypothesis 3

The results was showed that $p < 0.05$ and $r = -0.275$. Since the p-value is lesser than 0.05, and the null hypothesis were rejected. Therefore, there is a significant relationship between job control and turnover intention. Meanwhile, for the magnitude of correlation, it depicted a low correlation (Guilford, 1956) and the direction was negative. It showed that the level of social support is high and able to eliminate the turnover intention among academics (Thoits, 1983; Neumann & Finaly-Neumann, 1990) and it is contrary with previous research done by Kusku (2003).

Explanation of Variance

In order to understand the explanation of variance between these variables, job control and social support were entered simultaneously as predictors in a multiple regression analysis. Table 3 depicted the results of explained variance and Table 4 showed the analysis of variance derived

TABLE 3
Explained variance (job control and social support towards turnover intention)

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.281(a)	0.079	0.07	1.5081

Predictors: (Constant), Job Control, Social Support

TABLE 4
Analysis of variance

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	38.697	2	19.348	8.507	0.000 (a)
Residual	450.326	198	2.274		
Total	489.023	200			

from the test of regression while Table 5 revealed the predictor of turnover intention.

According to the result, it is showed that job control and social support explained only 8 percents in turnover intention among academics in private HLEs and the strength of the relationship is considered as low relationship ($R = 0.281$).

The results revealed that both independent variables (job control and social support) have significant relationships with turnover intention among academics in private HLEs. The p-value obtained was 0.000 which was lesser than 0.05 with the corresponding F-value of 8.507. This means that the regression model which consists of job control and social support and turnover intention was significant.

The results showed that social support was a significant predictor for turnover intention. The β value of -0.441 and p-value of 0.001 indicates that it is a moderate significant predictor of turnover intention. It is viewed that social support has a negative effect on turnover intention as the estimated coefficient were negative. In other words, an increase in social support would reduce turnover intention. For instance, if social support increases by one unit, then turnover intention would decrease by 0.441 units

and vice versa. Therefore, the equation of the model above can be written as follows:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Turnover Intention} \\ = & 5.396 - 0.159(\text{Job Control}) \\ & - 0.441(\text{Social Support}) + e \end{aligned}$$

Where the 'e' is error.

However, the estimated coefficient for job control (as the other independent predictor) was not significant statistically. This indicated by its computed t-statistic and p-value more than 0.05. Thus, the best predictor for the turnover intention is social support.

CONCLUSION

The overall mean for turnover intention among academics in private HLEs can be considered as moderate with the mean's value of 2.64 and generally the issue of turnover intention can be summarized as not a serious problem. This finding aligns with public HLE (Morris *et al.*, 2004) although the contexts (private versus public) are different due to several factors such as accountability to different stakeholders, sources of funding, profit orientation, bureaucratic, regulatory costs and obligations to the public (Triantafillou, 2004).

TABLE 5
Regression Coefficients among job control and social support

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	5.396	0.844		6.395	0.000
Job Control	-0.159	0.184	-0.066	-0.862	0.390
Social Support	-0.441	0.136	-0.246	-3.234	0.001

Dependent variable: Turnover Intention

Since this study replicated the model from the study done by Durrishah et al. (2009), the researcher found out that the model which stated that occupational contents and turnover intention among the managers could not be a best predictor of turnover intention when it comes to the academics. This was supported by the R² value from this study which was stated that only eight percent in explaining of variance turnover intention among academics compared to R² value of 49 percent of variance explains in turnover intention among managers in that particular industries environment. Moreover, the relationship of the model proposed depicts a low relationship between predictors and turnover intention.

The researcher believed that when it comes to the interest of turnover intention among academics in private HLEs, the constructs proposed could not be the best predictor in turnover intention. Therefore, in future studies, this turnover issue should consider variables like job satisfaction (Mobley, 1977), organizational commitment (Mowday *et al.*, 1982; Mathieu & Zajac, 1990) and organizational support (Blau, 1964; Eisenberger, 1986) which were derived from the element of job security, salary and compensation, leadership and others.

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