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THE EFFECT OF PERCEIVED ORGANISATIONAL
SUPPORT, PERCEIVED CO-WORKER SUPPORT,
AND JOB EMBEDDEDNESS ON EMPLOYEE
RETENTION IN MALAYSIAN PRIVATE
UNIVERSITIES



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LIM YONG HOOI

SULTAN IDRIS EDUCATION UNIVERSITY

2023



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CO-WORKER SUPPORT, AND JOB EMBEDDEDNESS ON EMPLOYEE
RETENTION IN MALAYSIAN PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES

LIM YONG HOOI

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SULTAN IDRIS EDUCATION UNIVERSITY

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God's blessings be with you all.



ABSTRACT

The main objective of this study is to examine the effect of perceived organisational support (POS), perceived co-worker support (PCWS), and job embeddedness (JE) on employee retention (ER) in Malaysian private universities. The respondents are full-time academic staff working at Malaysian private universities. The stratified sampling technique was used to collect data for this study. The results of the pre-testing and pilot study are satisfactory. All data had been analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software version 16 and Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM). The findings of this study indicated that the total and direct effects of POS on ER are significant ($p < 0.05$). It can be concluded that JE partially mediates the relationship between POS and ER. However, there is no direct relationship between PCWS and ER. ER cannot be increased by providing high PCWS directly. It should go through JE as a mediator. This study, which further assesses the mediating role of JE by using PLS-SEM, has added to the limited body of literature on ER. It also provided fresh insight for HR practitioners from private universities in Malaysia to determine the most useful technique on how to retain academic staff even when an opportunity arises by emphasising JE.

KESAN TANGGAPAN SOKONGAN ORGANISASI, TANGGAPAN SOKONGAN RAKAN SEKERJA, DAN KETERLIBATAN KERJA TERHADAP PENGEKALAN PEKERJA DI UNIVERSITI SWASTA MALASIA

ABSTRAK

Objektif utama kajian ini adalah untuk mengkaji kesan tanggapan sokongan organisasi (POS), tanggapan sokongan rakan sekerja (PCWS), dan keterlibatan kerja (JE) terhadap pengekalan pekerja (ER) di universiti swasta Malaysia. Responden adalah staf-akademik sepenuh masa yang bekerja di universiti swasta Malaysia. Teknik persampelan berstrata digunakan untuk mengumpul data bagi kajian ini. Keputusan ujian pra dan kajian rintis adalah memuaskan. Semua data telah dianalisis dengan menggunakan perisian Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) versi 16 dan Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM). Dapatan kajian ini menunjukkan bahawa jumlah kesan dan kesan langsung POS terhadap ER adalah signifikan ($p < 0.05$). Dapat disimpulkan bahawa JE menjadi mediasi hubungan antara POS dan ER sebahagiannya. Walau bagaimanapun, tiada hubungan langsung antara PCWS dan ER. ER tidak boleh ditingkatkan dengan PCWS secara langsung. Ia harus melalui JE sebagai mediasi. Kajian ini, yang menilai selanjutnya peranan pengantara JE dengan menggunakan PLS-SEM, telah menambah kepada badan literatur terhadap ER. Ia juga memberikan pandangan baru kepada pengamal HR dari universiti swasta di Malaysia untuk menentukan teknik yang lebih berguna tentang cara mengekalkan staf-akademik walaupun ada peluang yang timbul dengan menekankan JE.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AVE	Average Variance Extracted
CB-SEM	Covariance-Based Structural Equation Modeling
CMV	Common Method Variance
COPPA	Code of Practice for Programme Accreditation
COR	Conservation of Resource
D	Omission Distance
EQA	External Qualification Agency
ER	Employee retention
ERR	Employee Retention rate
ETR	Employee Turnover Rate
f^2	Effect size
HEPs	Higher education providers
HLs	Higher Learning institutions
HOC	Higher-order-constructs
HR	Human resource
HRM	Human resource management
HTMT	Heterotrait-monotrait
IIUM	International Islamic University Malaysia
IPTA	Institusi Pendidikan Tinggi Awam
IPTS	Institusi Pendidikan Tinggi Swasta
IQA	Internal Qualification Agency
IT	Information Technology
JE	Job Embeddedness



JEon	On-the-Job Embeddedness
JEoff	Off-the-Job Embeddedness
JS	Job Satisfaction higher-order-constructs (HOC).
LAN	Lembaga Akreditasi Negara/National Accreditation Board
LOC	Lower-order-construct
MEB (HE)	Malaysia Education Blueprint 2015-2025 (Higher Education)
MMU	Universiti Multimedia
MQA	Malaysian Qualification Agency
MQF	Malaysian Qualifications Framework
MSU	Management and Science University
MVs	Manifest variables
OC	Organisational Commitment
PCWS	Perceived Co-worker Support
PHEIs	Private Higher Education Institutions
PLS-SEM	Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling
POS	Perceived Organisational Support
PSPTN	Pelan Strategik Pengajian Tinggi Negara
PTPTN	Perbadanan Tabung Pendidikan Tinggi Nasional
Q2	Prediction relevance
QNR	Questionnaire
R	Reverse scored
R2	Coefficient of determination
SET	Social Exchange Theory
SM	Structural Model
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Science

UCSI	University College Sedaya International
UiTM	Universiti Teknologi MARA
UKM	Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia
UM	Universiti Malaya
UMP	Universiti Malaysia Pahang
UMS	Universiti Malaysia Sabah
UNiMAP	Universiti Malaysia Perlis
UNIMAS	Universiti Malaysia Sarawak
UNITEN	Universiti Tenaga Nasional
UPM	Universiti Putra Malaysia
UPSI	Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris
USM	Universiti Sains Malaysia
UTAR	Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman
UTM	Universiti Teknologi Malaysia
UTP	Universiti Teknologi Petronas
UUM	Universiti Utara Malaysia
VIF	Variance Inflation Factor

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Employee Retention (ER) could be increased by taking the initiative to improve the employer's ability to attract and build a mutually positive long-term relationship with the employee. Retaining talented employees has always been a big challenge for managers and poses unprecedented challenges in today's competitive environment (Messmer, 2000). Likewise, in Malaysian private universities, they are also working at a very high level of competitiveness (Manogharan et al., 2018). It is very important for them to develop a more effective retention strategy to retain academic staff so that they can maintain the high quality of education, which can raise the university's ability to compete with their competitors. Hence, academic staff retention in Malaysian private universities should receive more attention. Numerous studies have been conducted on why people leave their organisations based on the traditional attitude model, which is

under the old theory of turnover. Most of them have examined turnover with on-the-job factors such as job satisfaction and job commitment. While some employees are satisfied and committed to their job, when opportunities arise, they will still leave their organisation. This study aims to determine how to retain academic staff even when an opportunity arises. This chapter introduces the background of the present research and discusses the research problem, research objectives, and research questions. The chapter also briefly defines the key terms and discusses the significance of the study.

1.2 Background of the Study

In today's world, retaining personnel appears to be a major challenge for every company and organisation. Many firms are always struggling to retain talented employees (Maceda, 2017). Each talented employee possesses a different set of skills and knowledge that cannot be completely replaced by other people. According to Shethna (2017), 85% of a company's assets are the skills of its employees. All intangible assets, such as brands, intellectual property, trademarks, patents, and copyrights, are designed by humans. Therefore, the most valuable asset for an organisation is all the employees who are working for it. All employees play a very important role in contributing to the success of the organisation. Talented employees who have high capabilities will make significant contributions to the organisation in order to increase their competitive advantage. Having a high ER is vital to a successful business (Aman-Ullah et al., 2020).



ER can be defined as the efforts or initiative in developing strategies by an organisation to support and avoid its employees resigning from the organisation. It is the ability of an organisation to encourage its employees to remain in the organisation for a longer period of time (Das, 2013). One of the most effective strategies to gain a competitive advantage is to retain talented employees who can make significant contributions to organisational performance. This is very important for the organisation to retain its success (Gabcanova, 2011; Aman-Ullah et al., 2020). Retaining employees can be measured using the ER rate (ERR) or Employee Turnover Rate (ETR). If an organisation has a high turnover rate, the ER rate is low, and vice versa. Therefore, in order to maintain a high ER, the organisation should maintain a low staff turnover rate. ER is one of the elements that affects the overall mobility of employees in an organisation; the other is employee turnover, which can be considered the other side of the same coin (Bernardino, 2022; Msengeti & Obwogi, 2014).

Higher education plays a key role in transforming and building a nation. Transforming Malaysia into a developed country requires higher education to produce a high-quality, knowledgeable, and well-rounded workforce in order to increase the nation's ability to compete especially in the global arena (Wan et al., 2018; Tan et al., 2020). One of the Malaysian government's long-term ambitions (vision) is to make Malaysia known for having *high quality tertiary education, excellent individuals, and a prosperous nation* (Ministry of Education Malaysia: Higher education, 2018). Besides, the Malaysian government also has the vision of transforming Malaysia into an educational center in the Asian region and aims to provide quality education in order to produce a high-quality workforce. Malaysian private universities are playing a vital





role in supporting the Malaysian government (Financial Express, 2007; Manogharan et al., 2018).

The government of Malaysia acknowledges the importance of private higher institutions in producing a pool of highly qualified and skilled professionals (Chen & Su-Yen, 2016). In order to improve the quality of higher education in Malaysia, such as standards, lecturers, and infrastructure, the “National Strategic Higher Education Plan” (PSPTN) was set up by the Malaysian government in 2007. The performance and progress on PSPTN were reviewed comprehensively by the Ministry (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2015). Besides, the Malaysian Education Blueprint 2015-2025 (Higher Education)/MEB (HE), which is to enhance the quality of higher education, was developed by the Ministry in 2013. This will prepare Malaysia to become a high-income nation. Furthermore, the national accreditation committee had been launched by the Ministry of Education. The quality assessment of private higher education institutions will be done by this committee to keep all the Malaysian private universities on their toes in terms of compliance and regulation (Richard, 2016; Sohail et al., 2003). Currently, Malaysia has 111 universities, which consist of 20 public universities, 47 private universities, 34 private university-colleges, and 10 foreign university branch campuses (StudyMalaysia.com, 2022a).

However, Malaysian private universities are facing some challenges because they do not receive any research grants, funding, or direct subsidies from any source. They sustain their operational costs normally by relying on corporate investment, alumni, and student funding (Ministry of Higher Education, 2011; Teh, 2014). Therefore, they are operating in a very competitive environment. They are facing a big





challenge to retain their talented employees and ensure they can be retained even where there are other opportunities available (Manogharan et al., 2018). Aggressive promotional strategies need to be used to differentiate the institutions (Winter et al., 2000). They need to be proactive in maintaining high educational standards in order to gain competitive advantage (Altbach, 1996). Many private higher education institutions have shown their commitment to implementing high-quality practices by ensuring educational services are always maintained with high professionalism and teaching capability among academic staff. Academic staff are always dealing with students directly; they are considered to be involved in the core process of the university and play a very important role in determining the quality of private higher education institutions in order to gain a competitive advantage (Arokiasamy et al., 2011; Financial Express, 2007). Therefore, ER among academic staff plays a significant role in contributing to the high quality of education. In Malaysian private higher education institutions, the turnover rate of talented employees is surprisingly high for faculty heads, senior lecturers, and also new lecturers (Manogharan et al., 2018). According to the Department of Statistics Malaysia (2022), although the number of private institutions continues to increase at the moment, the total number of academic staff has dropped from 32,992 in 2010 to 28,570 in 2021. Therefore, it is crucial for private universities to determine the most useful technique for retaining academic staff even when other opportunities arise.

According to Smith et al. (2022) and Yang et al. (2011), JE has a significant direct effect on ER. It is further noted that the high turnover rate among academic staff might be caused by their low JE. Dawson and Abbott (2011) and Wahyudi et al. (2022) claimed that employee turnover could be reduced by hiring the right people and





embedding them in the organisation. JE was introduced by Mitchell et al. (2001), and it emphasised why people stay rather than why people leave their organisations. It emphasised employees who do not change their current jobs, even when it might be advantageous to do so. Job Embeddedness (JE) comprises two distinct factors, traditionally known as work and non-work factors, whereby the work factor is synonymous with the on-the-job factor whereas the non-work factor is envisaged to be the off-the-job factor. In addition, there are three dimensions to each factor mentioned, namely fit, links, and sacrifice (Yao et al., 2004). JE is composed of the fit between an individual's values and their job as well as the surrounding environment in the community, the links an individual has with groups and activities in an organisation and community, and job-related and community losses (sacrifice) that would be incurred if an individual decides to leave his or her position (Mitchell et al., 2001; Snow 2002). That is to say, JE is one of the important factors that has a significant direct effect on ER.

For employees with a higher level of job embeddedness, it would be more difficult for them to leave, and they would be more willing to continue to stay in their organisation. Having said that, every individual is not only embedded with their current working organisation but also embedded with their life outside of work, and the higher the level of JE, the higher the retention of employees, and they would continue to stay in their current working organisation. JE is found to be positively related to ER (Mitchell et al., 2001). According to Holtom et al. (2020) and Tanova and Holtom (2008), JE can predict ER better than traditional constructs, e.g. job satisfaction and organisational commitment. Academic staff from Malaysian private universities might have a lower feeling of JE, which they might not be able to embed with their current





working university as well as their life outside of work. Academic staff with a low level of organisational embeddedness and community embeddedness have a higher tendency to leave their university if there are any better opportunities. Therefore, increasing JE for both work and non-work aspects among academic staff is the next challenge for Malaysian private universities.

Additionally, Giosan (2003) found that by increasing organisational support, JE can be increased. JE can be increased if the employees perceive that the company accepts their interests as equally valuable as the company's (Otaye & Wong, 2014). Organisational support will make employees feel that they are valued and recognised. Thus, they would tend to show positive reactions and attitudes as well as be willing to put more effort into doing their tasks, in which they are more embedded (Rahimnia et al., 2021; Tsai et al., 2015). Besides, for employees who have a high level of trust and a good connection with their co-workers, they can be more embedded in their organisation, which is aligned with Social Exchange Theory (SET). When employees receive more emotional support from their co-workers, trust can be built among them. Then they will reciprocate through their JE (Karatepe, 2013; Self et al., 2020). According to Yang et al. (2011), the greater the fit, links, and sacrifices to their working and nonworking places (on-the-job factor and off-the-job factor), the more embedded the employees are in their organisation. The relationship between organisational factors and ER is mediated by JE, which is proposed by the JE theory (Mitchell et al., 2001). JE can be enhanced by receiving more support from the organisation as well as co-workers; this will lead to high ER. Therefore, JE plays a crucial mediating role in retaining employees.



Many researchers studied the mediating factors that affect ER, where many of these factors are related to on-the-job factors, such as job satisfaction (Bharadwaj et al., 2022; Bhardwaj et al., 2021; Bufquin et al., 2017; Hassan et al., 2021; Sharif et al., 2021), organisational commitment (Agus & Selvaraj, 2020; Arasanmi & Krishna, 2019; Bufquin et al., 2017; D'Amato & Herzfeldt, 2008), psychological empowerment (Ratau, 2021), organisational identification (Bharadwaj et al., 2022), psychological contract (Nayak et al., 2021), motivation (Mata et al., 2021), employee engagement (Ekhsan et al., 2021), work engagement (Fernando & Nishanthi, 2021), and person–organisation fit (Yusliza et al., 2021). However, there is still a lack of studies conducted on the mediating role of JE in the relationship between POS, PCWS, and ER in Malaysian private universities. This study is hoped to contribute to the Social Exchange Theory by examining the mediating role of JE, which consists of on-the-job and off-the-job factors. This study is interested in examining how perceived organisational support (POS) and perceived co-worker support (PCWS) can influence employee retention (ER) through job embeddedness (JE) among academic staff in Malaysian private universities. This study aims to determine how to retain academic staff even when other opportunities arise.

In order to maintain a high ER, it is never an easy task for any private university. There is a need to understand how talented academic staff can be retained more effectively. The university must know how talented academic staff can be highly embedded in the university and also in the community, so that they will remain in their university even if there are other opportunities available elsewhere. This is the very first step in addressing the problem, and the researcher is in the best position to offer alternatives or practical solutions to the problem. This study can help provide more

useful methods to Malaysian universities and the Malaysian government on how to keep talented academic staff even when other opportunities are available elsewhere by emphasizing JE (on-the-job and off-the-job).

1.3 Statement of the Problems

The high achievement of any organisation depends on the contributions and high quality of performance of its employees (Manogharan et al., 2018). In today's world, "How to retain talented employees?" appears to be a major challenge for every company and organisation. Many firms are always struggling to retain talented employees. ER becomes a major headache for upper management (Maceda, 2017).

Holtom et al. (2008) highlighted that the retention of high-quality employees is more important today than ever before. Besides, ER is a serious issue in human resource management (Bandura & Lyons, 2014). Malaysian private universities are also struggling with the issue of retaining academic staff (Manogharan et al., 2018). Therefore, there is a need for practitioners from Malaysian private universities to determine how to retain their academic staff even when there are other opportunities available.

1.3.1 POS and ER

According to Eisenberger et al. (1990) and Wayne et al. (1997), POS is negatively related to the intention to leave, and employees would be more willing to remain in



their organisation. They are less likely to seek and accept jobs from other organisations if greater POS is provided where employers recognise their employees' contributions, value them, and care about their welfare (Eisenberger et al., 1990; Eisenberger et al., 1986; Shore & Wayne, 1993; Wayne et al., 1997). This is supported by Rhoades et al. (2001), who studied the relationship between POS and turnover behaviour. There are significant signs that they are negatively related. The norm of reciprocity shows that people tend to have strong feelings of obligation to help those who have provided support to them before (Gouldner, 1960). For those who have received high POS, they are more likely to feel obligated to “repay” their organisation through “continued participation” and retain their organisation (Eisenberger et al., 1990; Eisenberger et al., 1986; Shore & Wayne, 1993). The support received from management is one of the justifiable factors that affect ER (Kurdia et al., 2020).



However, Bohassan and Muhammad (2021) reported different results. They investigated the effect of POS on ER among staff who were currently working at Manatat School in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. The result showed that POS did not significantly affect ER. Most of the employees were not willing to stay for a long period of time in the current organisation. Even with the support of their organisation, they were still reluctant to invest in and retain it.

Previous studies on the relationship between POS and ER provided contradictory results. Hence, a clear conclusion on the relationship between POS and ER cannot be established. Thus, another potential intervening factor is anticipated to explain the different result. Therefore, this gap should be filled by this study.



1.3.2 PCWS and ER

Huselid (1995) and Clercq, et al. (2020) found that supportive organisational practices as well as co-workers' support have a significant influence on employee turnover. In other words, an individual's intention to stay can be reciprocated by providing a supportive working environment and also receiving support from co-workers. People are more likely to stay with an organisation if they are able to get help from their colleagues when facing difficulties. A total of 80% of employees want to work in a better and more conducive work environment. It becomes important for the employer to provide a supportive work environment to cultivate high ER (Ghosh & Sahney, 2011; Guchait & Cho, 2010). A happy organisation can be built as employees' second home where they are happy with their working environment. This can keep all employees working with them for a long time (Suphaphun et al., 2014). Choy et al. (1993) found that if academic staff perceived a lack of support, they would put less effort into doing their work.

However, Mossholder et al. (2011) argued that there is no significant impact of co-workers' support on turnover or retention. This is supported by Chung et al. (2021), Loi et al. (2014), and Mutsuddi et al. (2020), who found that PCWS did not have a significant effect on the willingness of employees to stay/remain in their organisation. Due to the co-workers being at the same level in the organisation, the recognition and support received from colleagues did not significantly influence their turnover intention. Even if they obtained support from their co-workers, they still did not stay for a longer period of time in their organisation.

The previous studies on the relationship between PCWS and ER provided different results. Hence, a clear conclusion on the relationship between PCWS and ER cannot be established, which leads to another potential intervening factor anticipated to explain the different result. Therefore, this is the gap to be explored and filled by this study, where the mediating factor should be examined to have a better understanding of the relationship between POS, PCWS, and ER.

1.3.3 JE as a Mediator between POS and PCWS and ER

Referring to the Social Exchange Theory, high POS can create a feeling of obligation to the organisation, where the employees tend to feel more obligated to support their organisational goals and willing to retain their organisation. Allen et al. (2003) concluded that POS plays an important role in the turnover process. However, Allen et al. (2003) argued that although there are some facts that show that POS is significantly related to turnover intention, there is evidence to suggest that these effects are mediated. Many models of turnover have identified that organisational commitment and job satisfaction mediate the relationship with withdrawal, and they are two of the most important constructs in turnover research (Hom & Griffeth, 1995).

Most turnover theories have found that people leave when they feel that they are not happy and satisfied with their work and that there are other job alternatives. This emphasises low job satisfaction, low commitment, and prevailing job alternatives dominating the voluntary turnover study (Ekhsan, 2019). The researchers' study of the traditional attitude-driven process and its component parts was extensive (Hom &

Griffeth, 1995; Maertz & Campion, 1998). Job satisfaction and organisational commitment are the two attitudinal constructs most frequently studied by the researchers (Rodríguez-Fernández et al., 2021; Purwanto et al., 2021; Jaros, 1997).

However, job commitment (Allen et al., 2003; Albalawi et al., 2019; Arasanmi & Krishna, 2019) and job satisfaction (Allen et al., 2003; Li et al., 2020) were found to have mediated the relationship between POS and turnover. Thus, POS may affect turnover as a critical antecedent to commitment. The largest part of these relationships was accounted for by the path through POS and commitment. Similarly, Wayne et al. (1997) stated that POS might be expected to be linked to turnover and that their relationship is mediated by commitment. Besides, Rhoades et al. (2001) found evidence that commitment mediates the relationship between POS and turnover.

The most interesting point here is that while some employees are happy, satisfied, and committed to their job, they will still leave their organisation when opportunities arise. In many cases, negative attitudes are simply not associated with leaving (Campion, 1991). Research from scientific journals indicates that work attitudes, such as organisational commitment and job satisfaction, only play a relatively minor role in preventing employees from leaving. These attitudinal variables control about 4-20 percent of the variance in turnover (Do, 2021; Griffeth et al., 2000; Hom & Griffeth, 1995).

Therefore, Maertz and Campion (1998) concluded that some other variables that are important in explaining and predicting turnover had been left out. Prasetyo et al. (2021) suggested that there is a need to further explore some other factors in reducing



turnover. Mitchell et al. (2001) raised this question: “Why do people stay in their organisations and occupations even when other opportunities are available elsewhere?”. The JE construct was developed by the researchers to get the answer to this interesting question. This new construct was introduced by Mitchell et al. (2001) to explain why, even when there are plentiful opportunities, people still do not change their jobs to other organisations. Mitchell et al. (2001) defined organisational embeddedness as the totality of forces, which include fit, links, and sacrifice, that keep people in their current employment. It embeds workers in their current employment even when there is an opportunity to change jobs. This new construct of JE emphasises people who do not change jobs, even when it might be advantageous to do so. It explicitly includes both on-the-job and off-the-job factors that influence retention (Mallol et al., 2007). March and Simon (1958) suggested that many off-the-job factors play an important role in determining why people stay or leave. Lee et al. (1999b) also found that many employees leave their organisations because of discernible precipitating events. For example, a spouse relocates or an unsolicited job offer is received. These events occur off the job. To retain staff even when other opportunities are available, the organisation should make its staff embed themselves in the organisation and also in the community (on and off-the-job factors).

However, these two attitudinal constructs (job satisfaction and job commitment) are on-the-job factors that may only control about 4-8 percent of the variance in turnover (Griffeth et al., 2000; Hom & Griffeth, 1995). In addition, Mitchell et al. (2001) pointed out that OC is concerned with organisational issues. Thus, half of the JE construct is simply not covered by OC. Therefore, JE is better than JC and JS at predicting turnover (Mitchell et al., 2001). This new theory of turnover and JE focused





on why people stay rather than on how they leave. In particular, attention is drawn to the reasons people stay through their JE construct (Mitchell et al., 2001). Furthermore, Giosan (2003) did a study to identify the predictors of JE. The results showed that people who seemed to be more likely to become embedded were those who perceived that the organisation supported them. The possible ways to increase embeddedness are by increasing organisational support and co-worker support, which cannot be ignored.

1.3.4 Commentary on Research Gap

Social exchange theory is used to support the conceptual framework of this study. According to Ladd and Henry (2000), Blau developed the social exchange theory in 1964 as a general theory of social behaviour that is always used to study and understand social behaviour and relationships in the working organisation. The social exchange theory was originally developed to analyse human behaviour in relation to resource exchange. If the other party offers something that is good and useful to another party, the other party is obliged and takes immediate action with an equally favourable offer (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002; Ye et al., 2015). Once the employee has established the relationship of social exchange, a long-term relationship can be maintained by involving a socio-emotional benefits exchange (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005; Gouldner, 1960; Masterson et al., 2000).

Many researchers and scholars, such as Cook et al. (2013), Cropanzano et al. (2017), Lambe et al. (2001), Qi et al. (2021), Ward, C., and Berno, T. (2011), and Zafirovski, M. (2005), have commented on the social exchange theory. Day (1995)



claimed that “some relational exchange arrangements are deliberately short lived.” The social exchange theory does not clearly explain the development of an exchange relationship over a long period of time. Dwyer et al. (1987) pinpointed that the development process of a relationship proposed by the social exchange theory is less effective in explaining the nature of a long-term relationship exchange. Social exchange theory does not take into account opportunism, so its ability to explain long-term exchange relationship development is limited. The exchange partners have even managed to achieve a good and positive exchange relationship; however, this rule could be broken when there are other opportunities elsewhere. On the basis of social exchange theory, job satisfaction and organisational commitment are the most commonly tested constructs. Organisational commitment (Suárez-Albanchez et al., 2022; Tumwesigye, 2010) and job satisfaction (Ghasempour Ganji et al., 2021; Sharif et al., 2021) play an important mediating role in the relationship between POS and turnover intention, as well as PCWS and turnover intention (Guchait et al., 2014).

However, some researchers argued that there are some employees with a high level of job satisfaction and commitment to their work, but they will leave whenever possible (Astuti et al., 2022; Birnstiel, 2022; Mitchell et al., 2001). Birnstiel (2022), Lee and Mitchell (1994), and Permana (2022) claimed that many high turnover rates could not be clarified using a traditional model. The traditional model only includes work-related factors (on-the-job) (Irvine & Evans, 1995; Jaros, 1997; Yang et al., 2011). For non-work-related factors (off-the-job), this is an undiscovered aspect in the social exchange theory; thus, this served as a gap for this study to explore.



In the social exchange theory, employee turnover intentions could be reduced and ER could be increased by providing more support to build positive exchange relationships. According to He et al. (2011) and Ladd and Henry (2000), the main support received by employees in the workplace is organisational support and co-worker support. Due to the contradictory results, a clear conclusion on the relationship between POS, PCWS, and ER has yet to be established. Thus, another potential intervening factor is anticipated to explain the different result. The relationship between POS, PCWS, and ER is mediated.

In addition, most studies focused on specifically examining the exchange relationship at the supervisor-member relationship rather than the co-worker exchange relationship. Tucker et al. (2008) argued that perceived co-workers' support is an important factor yet often neglected. The support received from co-workers has been less focused on in most studies. However, PCWS plays a key role in understanding social behaviour in an organisation. If they receive support and help from their co-workers when facing difficulties, this will make them feel that they are appreciated, empathised with, respected, and trusted, which causes them to have higher embeddedness (Eisenberger & Stinglhamber, 2011; Halbesleben & Wheeler, 2015; Singh et al., 2018).

Furthermore, the perceived role that co-workers' support and POS play in understanding employees' retention via JE has yet to be completely specified and established. Numerous studies only focused on why people leave their organisations and examined these two on-the-job factors, namely job satisfaction (Abdullah et al., 2021; Mumu et al., 2021; Pandey et al., 2021; Otu et al., 2021; Yousuf & Saqib, 2021)



and organisational commitment (Abdullah et al., 2021; Otu et al., 2021). These two on-the-job factors are the two attitudinal constructs most frequently studied by the researchers.

Apart from this, a large number of studies had been conducted in the field of ER in various industries, such as the manufacturing industry in Malaysia (Ibrahim et al., 2021), banking industry in Indonesia (Permatasari & Zona, 2021), banking and telecom sector in Pakistan (Khan, 2021), technical and vocational training organisations (Sepahvand & Bagherzadeh Khodashahri, 2021), hotel industry in Indonesia (Saputra & Riana, 2021), telecommunication industry in Africa (Jacqueline & Nafula, 2021), banking industry in Nigeria (Abba & Babanmairam, 2021), manufacturing companies in Africa (Magaisa & Musundire, 2022), hospitality sector in India (Chawla, 2021), small-and-medium sized enterprises in Pakistan (Raziq et al., 2021), oil and gas industries in Oman (Al Habsi et al., 2021), fast food industry in the US (Umezurike, 2021), and aviation sector in Turkey (Abdullah & Kavraz, 2021). However, there is a lack of information, and little research has been done at private universities. Similarly, there is still a lack of information and knowledge on JE in the education sector, especially in Malaysia. Many scholars have done studies in Egypt (Elshaer & Azazz, 2022), Taiwan (Teng et al., 2021), China (Park, 2021; Wen et al., 2021), Turkey (Akgunduz & Sanli, 2017), Australia (Stewart & Wiener, 2021), Pakistan (Ali et al., 2021; Khalid et al., 2021), Iran (Rahimnia et al., 2021), Japan (Peltokorpi et al., 2022), and Ghana (Amoah et al., 2021). Studies on how POS and PCWS can influence employees' retention through JE have received less focus in the context of Malaysian private universities among academic staff. Furthermore, with a high turnover rate of academic staff in higher education private institutions, there is also increasing attention

to studying ER in a Malaysian context (Fauziah & Kumaruzaman, 2009; Muniapan, 2007; Yusoff et al., 2021).

In such a way, these are the gaps to be explored and filled by this study, where the mediating factor should be examined to have a better understanding of the relationship between POS, PCWS, and ER. Understanding the relationship could help human resource practitioners from Malaysian private universities make significant improvements in strategizing their staff retention plan. Therefore, the main objective of this study is to fill the gap by examining how POS and PCWS can influence ER through JE among academic staff in Malaysian private universities. This study is intended to determine how to retain academic staff even when other opportunities arise.

1.3.5 Issue in Malaysian Private Universities

In order to respond to market needs and demands as well as the extensive changes, the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA) was set up by the Malaysian government in 2007. Its objective is to make sure higher education institutions can meet the international standard of quality in order to get recognition (Ministry of Higher Education, 2016). For private universities to maintain the high standard of quality and high achievement that is aligned with the Malaysian government's aims, the university should always be proactive to maintain the high quality of teaching and professionalism among academic staff because they are the core of the university (Arokiasamy et al., 2011; Financial Express, 2007). According to Fauziah and Kumaruzaman (2009), in

order to be a world class higher education centre, one of the most important criteria is the ability to retain valued academic staff in their universities.

However, Malaysian private universities are operating in a very competitive environment in terms of quality, and they are struggling with the issue of keeping productive academic staff (Jayabalan et al., 2021; Manogharan et al., 2018). Academic staff in higher education institutions frequently experience a higher level of stress and greater burnout than non-academics, according to Mohamed et al. (2021). Many researchers have found that the level of job stress for lecturers in higher education ranges from middle to high (Donders et al., 2003; Jing, 2008; Leung et al., 2000; Manogharan et al., 2018; Yaakob et al., 2009). Due to their demanding jobs, academic staff members at universities are at risk for high levels of stress and burnout (Nene, 2020). Academic staff need to handle different kinds of students in teaching and supervising at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels (Azman et al., 2010; Mukosolu et al., 2015; Wieclaw et al., 2005). Moreover, the pressure on them also increases continuously due to their primary focus being not only on teaching but also research, publication, projects, grants, consultancy, and other elements such as administrative work and marketing, as well as community services (Azman et al., 2010; Manogharan et al., 2018; Mukosolu et al., 2015; National Higher Education Research Institute, n.d.). Their academic responsibilities include research, teaching, administrative support, and community service (Nene, 2020). In 2013, the annual turnover rate of industries was 13.2%. The turnover rate increased by 0.9%. However, staff turnover for Malaysian private universities is higher than 13.2% (Watson, 2013). According to human resource personnel at certain private universities, the turnover is about 18% (Ramasamy & Abbudullah, 2020). The shortage of academic staff in private

universities is a critical issue and is at an alarming stage (Manogharan et al., 2018; Muniapan, 2007; Zakaria et al., 2014). Support from employees is essential for any organisation to succeed (Manogharan et al., 2018).

When an academic staff member decides to leave their university, it has an impact on the entire university, including the students, management team, support team, and other academic staff, because they must act quickly to fill the vacant position (Cable & Turban 2001). The burden must be shared among the remaining employees while the institution searches for the best replacement, if it chooses to take its time. The current workforce will feel pressure to leave the organisation as a result of this predicament, which will irritate and dissatisfy them. However, the poor selection of practices implemented by the management without sufficient time for evaluation may lead to inefficiencies, such as subpar performance in terms of profitability, sales, and growth, if the selected candidate is later found to be unable to carry out their duties and fit into the current work environment (Mabutu et al., 2022; Mat et al., 2022). The research output and institution's reputation are negatively affected due to the loss of talented academic staff. Therefore, it is very costly to do "re-recruitment" because it involves extra time and money to recruit, select, and provide training to new employees (Ansari & Bijalwan, 2017). Choosing between profitability and cost must be balanced in private higher education institutions (Manogharan et al., 2018). This retention issue would significantly affect the quality of education and also drastically affect the Malaysian government's aim to offer world class higher education centres.

In view of talented academic staff who are often hunted by competitors and will leave their university even if they are happy and satisfied when there are better job

alternatives, the effort to retain talented academic staff must be prioritised to get more effective retention strategies (Holtom et al., 2006; Khalid & Nawab, 2018; Robyn & Du Preez, 2013; Thomas Lee et al., 2004).

1.4 Research Questions

Accordingly, the general and specific research questions for this study are as below:

General research questions: To what extent can POS and PCWS influence employees' retention through the mediating role of JE among academic staff in Malaysian private universities?

Specific research questions:

- i. Does POS have a direct effect on JE in Malaysian private universities?
- ii. Does PCWS have a direct effect on JE in Malaysian private universities?
- iii. Does POS have a direct effect on ER in Malaysian private universities?
- iv. Does PCWS have a direct effect on ER in Malaysian private universities?
- v. Does JE have a direct effect on ER in Malaysian private universities?
- vi. Does JE mediate the direct effect between POS and ER in Malaysian private universities?
- vii. Does JE mediate the direct effect between PCWS and ER in Malaysian private universities?



1.5 Research Objectives

In an attempt to bridge the identified research gap, the objective of this research is to further evaluate how POS and PCWS are related to ER through the mediating role of JE among academic staff in Malaysian private universities. There are seven specific objectives for this study. They are as follows:

- i. To determine if POS has a direct effect on JE in Malaysian private universities.
- ii. To determine if PCWS has a direct effect on JE in Malaysian private universities.
- iii. To determine if POS has a direct effect on ER in Malaysian private universities.
- iv. To determine if PCWS has a direct effect on ER in Malaysian private universities.
- v. To determine if JE has a direct effect on ER in Malaysian private universities.
- vi. To examine if JE mediates the direct effect between POS and ER in Malaysian private universities.
- vii. To examine if JE mediates the direct effect between PCWS and ER in Malaysian private universities.



1.6 Definition of Key Terms

1.6.1 Private University

In this study, a private university can be defined based on the definition provided by “Higher education in Malaysia, 2020b” and “StudyMalaysia, 2022c”. In this study, private universities are universities that are not government-funded universities. The government is not their main source of support. Undergraduate and graduate degree programmes are available at private universities in Malaysia, and these degrees can be awarded (Higher education in Malaysia, 2020b; StudyMalaysia, 2022c). A private university is a type of private higher education sector that is crucial to Malaysia's system of higher education. It is essential to the development of the country (Hanushek & Woessmann, 2020).

1.6.2 Academic Staff

The term "academic staff" refers to employees who are working in a university, and their primary responsibilities are related to the process of doing research and teaching (Atkin, 2016). This study's definition of academic staff is based on the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (2019). According to the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (2019), academic staff could be defined as “Personnel engaged by Higher Education Providers who are involved in teaching, training and supervision.” For a university, the primary functions of research and teaching are of utmost significance. In this process,



academic staff members have a significant impact on knowledge creation through research and dissemination through lectures.

1.6.3 Employee Retention (ER)

According to Akhtar et al. (2015), retention refers to the effort of an organisation to keep employees with positive assessments. They are usually involved in voluntary resignations. Otherwise stated, retention refers to a methodical attempt to develop and enhance the conditions of an environment that keeps workers motivated to work while putting in place policies and procedures that meet their various needs (Ghani et al., 2022). ER is a strategy where programmes of development and training are given to employees who subsequently become specialists in their work and dedicated to their employment, adding to the firm's benefit (Aruna & Anitha, 2015). The goal of ER is to maintain essential expertise within an organisation, but it may also be used to uncover ways to lower turnover and improve employee satisfaction rather than merely positioning them (Basnyat & Clarence Lao, 2019). In order to gain a competitive advantage, these groups of high performers need to be kept by employers; in other words, Cascio (2003) described retention as an initiative taken by an organisation to keep their employees from resigning from the organisation. Different organisations use different techniques to keep their employees. In this study, ER is used to measure the overall perception of success in retaining academic staff at Malaysian private universities. It is to measure the effort of the university to keep and retain academic staff with a positive assessment that involves voluntary resignation. In other words, it





is to measure the initiative taken by the university to keep the academic staff and prevent them from resigning voluntarily from their current university.

1.6.4 Job Embeddedness (JE)

JE emphasises why people stay instead of why people leave their workplace (Afsar et al., 2018). According to Yao et al. (2004), JE is defined as the combined forces necessary to keep a person in their current job. JE consists of two dimensions, which are the organisational dimension (on-the-job) and the community dimension (off-the-job). For each of these dimensions, there are three sub-dimensions: fit, links, and sacrifice. Thus, JE is measured by evaluating the link, fit, and sacrifice. In this study,

JE is a multidimensional construct to measure the perception of JE among academicians from Malaysian private universities, which comprises the dimensions of work and nonwork facets with three sub-dimensions known as fit, links, and sacrifices. In this study, from an organisational dimension (on-the-job) perspective, it is to measure the academic staff's perception of link and fit with their university, as well as what they would need to sacrifice if they left their university. In other words, it is to measure the extent of the academic staff's perceived compatibility and level of comfort with the setting within the university, in terms of whether their personal values, career goals, and future plans can be a good fit with the culture of the university. Besides, it measures the connection of the academic staff with their work activities and colleagues in the same university, as well as their perception of the psychological benefits or material costs that will be sacrificed if they leave their current university. However, from a community dimension (off-the-job) perspective, it is to measure the academic staff's



perception of link and fit with their community, as well as what they would need to sacrifice if they left their current community. It means that the academic staff would consider the extent to which the community and surroundings are perceived to fit with their personal and individual values, as well as the connection between the academic staff and group activities in their current community. Apart from this, it also measures the perception of the academic staff on the benefits they received that would be forfeited if they resigned from their current university.

1.6.5 Perceived Organisational Support (POS)

POS refers to an individual's belief concerning the extent which their well-being is cared for and that their contributions are valued by the organisation. The feeling of obligation to their employing organisation can be created with a high level of POS (Eisenberger et al., 1990; Kurtessis et al., 2017). POS is when employees believe they can obtain support and help from the organisation whenever needed. POS is directly correlated with the simultaneous exchanges that take place within the organisation (Orpina et al., 2022). When their contributions and well-being are valued and cared for by their employing organisation, this will make them feel that they are obligated to repay their employer by having high engagement in activities that support their organisational goals (Eisenberger et al., 1990; Kurtessis et al., 2017). If the organisation does not provide good attention and support to their employees, they will probably be more unsatisfied and uncooperative because they feel that they are entitled to compensation and do not think that further efforts would result in future potential returns and rewards (Knapp et al., 2017). The level of POS reveals employees' true



emotions about how much the company cares for and appreciates them (Arasanmi & Krishna, 2019). In this study, POS is used to measure the perception of support received by academicians from the top management of Malaysian private universities. It refers to the belief of the academic staff concerning to what extent their well-being and contribution are valued by the top management in their university. The high POS provided by the university can create a feeling of obligation to the university among all academic staff. When the university cares about and values the academic staff's contribution and well-being, they will feel highly obligated to repay the university by having a high level of involvement in activities such as teaching and research that support their university goals.



"Co-worker" is used to refer to peers in the workforce who are employed by the same organisation in order to record a social connection between them. Co-workers also typically share similar rank and status throughout the group work in the organisation (Kim et al., 2018a). Employees' ability to rely on their co-workers for assistance and support when necessary is referred to as co-worker support (Liao et al., 2004). According to Kim et al. (2017), PCWS refers to the co-worker exchange relationship where support is received from their colleagues in the workplace. The support given by peers, such as counselling, sharing information, taking over some tasks, caring for their needs, and listening to problems either work-related or non-work-related, is highly valued by employees (Kiazad et al., 2015; Meglich et al., 2016). When co-workers offer their support by expressing their care, giving counselling, sharing information, and





helping colleagues who are in need, this can strengthen the team spirit in the workplace (Wilkinson et al., 2017). Employees who experience co-worker support probably feel obligated to show support by engaging in constructive, proactive, and seminal work activities (Chiaburu & Harrison, 2008). In this study, PCWS is used to measure the perception of support from peers received by academicians who are working in Malaysian private universities. This refers to the peer exchange relationship where the academic staff receive support from their colleagues, such as other academic staff and administrative staff from the faculty office at their university. Academic staff highly value the support received from their colleagues, such as sharing information about teaching and research, caring for their needs, listening patiently to any problems faced, giving advice, and helping those in need. This can strengthen the bond and team spirit at the university.



1.7 Significance of Study

In the research on turnover, many organisational scholars were more focused on organisational commitment (Abdullah et al., 2021; Otu et al., 2021), job satisfaction (Abdullah et al., 2021; Mumu et al., 2021; Pandey et al., 2021; Otu et al., 2021; Yousuf & Saqib, 2021), human resource practices such as pay, promotion, and working conditions (Bhardwaj et al., 2021; Chawla & Singla, 2021; Mobley, 1982; Pettman, 1975), career development (Chawla & Singla, 2021; Boomer, 2009; Parmenter & Barnes, 2021), and superior-subordinate relationship (Parmenter & Barnes, 2021; Zenger et al., 2000). Hom and Griffeth (1995) claimed that organisational commitment and job satisfaction are two of the most important constructs in the research on turnover.



However, Mitchell et al. (2001) developed a new construct, namely JE, to capture a more complete picture of turnover predictors. More recently, there has even been a growing body of JE research, although empirical studies on the mediating role of JE in the relationship between POS, PCWS, and ER in Malaysian private universities is found to be still lacking and limited. There is still limited information and knowledge on JE in the education sector, especially in Malaysia. Many scholars have conducted studies in Egypt (Elshaer & Azazz, 2022), Taiwan (Teng et al., 2021), China (Park, 2021; Wen et al., 2021), Turkey (Akgunduz & Sanli, 2017), Australia (Stewart & Wiener, 2021), Pakistan (Ali et al., 2021; Khalid et al., 2021), Iran (Rahimnia et al., 2021), Japan (Peltokorpi et al., 2022), and Ghana (Amoah et al., 2021).

This study would contribute to the existing literature on turnover in four ways. Firstly, by examining the mediating role of JE in the relationship between POS, PCWS, and ER in Malaysian private universities, this study fills in the gap in the existing Social Exchange Theory. This study's breakthrough explores the unexplained aspects of the theory. A more comprehensive view of turnover predictors could be captured and understood. As such, this study would expand the knowledge of turnover in the literature review. Without studying JE, the prediction of turnover may not be explained and justified appropriately and clearly, especially in Malaysian private universities. Thus, the findings of this study would be crucial in contributing ideas for turnover to scholars and practitioners in Malaysia.

Secondly, upon completion and analysis of this study, the relationship between all the variables and the mediating role of JE was analysed and tested using



Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM). This study enables the researcher to test the effect of the independent variables on the dependent variable as well as the mediating role of a variable by using a new method of data analysis. PLS-SEM can be used to further evaluate and determine the relationship between the variables and the mediating role of each variable. This study is significant and can help to provide new insights of data analysis to researchers. This study has therefore added value to get new methodological views.

Thirdly, after the completion of this study, it can enhance earlier empirical research. This is because previous research only focused on workplace challenges (on-the-job factor) and the causes of employees leaving their organisations. This study primarily examined what motivates academic staff members to stay at their current university even when there are better possibilities available. It focuses more on academic staff members who remain in their current positions despite potential benefits. This study further examines the mediating effect of JE, which encompasses both on-the-job and off-the-job factors (Mitchell et al., 2001). Thus, this study can improve empirical research by providing a better understanding of the relationships between POS and ER, as well as PCWS and ER, among academic staff at Malaysian private universities.

Lastly, after this study has been completed, a clearer understanding of ER will be provided. This study can help provide new insights to practitioners who are looking for new methods to keep talented staff. This can help them make more thoughtful and effective decisions. Based on the findings of this study, the government of Malaysia can develop more appropriate systems and policies to further strengthen the practical





culture in the education sector in Malaysia, especially for Malaysian private universities. The results of this study would provide them with a more appropriate guideline to draft more effective and efficient strategies to reduce turnover and keep academic staff for a longer period of time. To put it another way, this study would help practitioners or policymakers in Malaysian private universities address the issue of brain drain among academic staff.

1.8 Scope of study

This study is to examine the relationship between POS, PCWS, JE, and ER among academic staff in Malaysian private universities. At private universities in Malaysia, undergraduate and graduate degree programmes are offered, and these degrees can be awarded. The Malaysian government does not support private universities in Malaysia. Having said that, the government does not run, own, or provide institutional funding for private universities in Malaysia. They may impose higher fees than at public universities (Higher education in Malaysia, 2020b; StudyMalaysia, 2022c).

This study primarily focused on private universities in Malaysia, as they are crucial to Malaysia's system of higher education. It is a type of private higher education sector that is essential to the development of the country (Hanushek & Woessmann, 2020). According to Rajaendram (2020), the private higher education sector has made a significant contribution to Malaysia's gross domestic product (GDP). Hanushek and Woessmann (2020) pinpointed that the creation of intellectual capital for a nation's development depends fundamentally on the private higher education industry. Chin





(2019) claimed that Malaysia contributes significantly to the global need for higher education. Academic staff is crucial in setting the quality of private higher education institutions (Jawabri, 2017).

In relation to the matter of retaining academic staff, the private higher education sector has encountered numerous challenges and impediments that have limited their ability to advance (Manogharan et al., 2018). Therefore, this study mainly focused on ER among the academic staff in Malaysian private universities in order to maintain the quality of higher education institutions. This study only targeted full-time academic staff who are currently working as tutors, lecturers, senior lecturers, assistant professors, associate professors, professors, or senior professors in the top six private universities, namely Taylor's University, UCSI University, UTP, UNITEN, MMU, and UTAR. By benchmarking themselves against other universities, these top six Malaysian private universities at the Asian and global levels have played a proactive and significant role (Yaakob et. al., 2009). Part-time academics were not included in the scope of this study. In this study, the unit of analysis is individual full-time academic staff. In addition, the unit of observation is the same as the unit of analysis in this study. As such, data were collected from individual full-time academic staff who are currently working at the top six private universities, namely Taylor's University, UCSI University, UTP, UNITEN, MMU, and UTAR.



1.9 Organisation of Chapters

There are five chapters in this thesis. Chapter 1 introduces the background of the study and discusses the problem statement, research objectives and research questions, definition of key terms, and significance of the study. Chapter 2 discusses the literature on the independent variable, mediating variable, and dependent variable in this study. The research gap, conceptual framework, and hypotheses are also discussed in this chapter. Chapter 3 discusses the research methodology for this study as well as the explanation of the method used. The next chapter reports the results of the data analysis, while Chapter 5 discusses the implications of the results and the direction for future research.

1.10 Summary

This chapter introduced the background of this study and discussed the research problem, research questions, and research methodology. The chapter also briefly introduced the conceptual framework and hypotheses. The emergence of the new construct JE is an exciting and important growing area in the turnover model to explain how to retain staff even though other opportunities are available. This study targets academic staff at private universities in Malaysia. An adoption of Allen et al.'s (2003) model provided the conceptual framework for this study and hypothesis. Furthermore, this study also assists in the understanding of how POS and PCWS are related to ER through the mediating role of JE among academic staff in Malaysian private universities. The next chapter reviews the theoretical and empirical literature related to POS, PCWS,



JE, and ER from various perspectives. It also discusses the research framework for this study and the development of the hypotheses.

