

Retention of Administrative Staff in Higher Education Institutions in Kazakhstan

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Ethical Approval



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This letter confirms that your research project, titled:

Administrative Staff Retention in Kazakhstani Higher Education Institutions

(a) has been approved by the Graduate School of Education Ethics Committee of Nazarbayev University.

You may contact your preferred research site and commence your participant recruitment strategy.

Yours sincerely,

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On behalf of:

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Abstract

Administrative staff retention in higher education institutions (HEIs) is an important issue due to its impact on an institution's effectiveness. At first glance, it may seem that factors such as low wages and limited career opportunities may seem like the main difficulties. Still, the main reasons influencing employees' decisions to stay or quit remain poorly studied. The purpose of this study was to explore how working conditions affect the turnover of administrative staff and identify the primary problems they face in Kazakhstani universities. Topics such as job satisfaction, recognition, leadership style, career perspectives, salary, and human resource policy were investigated to determine their influence on employee retention. The study used a qualitative methodology, during which semi-structured interviews were conducted with ten administrative staff members from a private and an autonomous university. Thematic analysis was used to identify the patterns in data. The results of the study showed that although the working conditions were generally acceptable, the lack or slow career growth, tension in the team, salary and hierarchical decision-making structures contributed to dissatisfaction. Employees of autonomous institutions noted higher social benefits, while employees of private universities noted the flexibility of working conditions. Despite some differences between the two types of universities, the wish for career advancement was common to all participants. The study suggests recommendations tailored to specific conditions for improving staff retention, including more structured career paths at the beginning of employment.

Keywords: staff retention, job satisfaction, staff turnover, working conditions, higher education institution

Аңдатпа

Жоғары оқу орындарындағы (ЖОО) әкімшілік қызметкерлердің тұрақтылығы – бұл мекеменің тиімділігіне әсер ететін маңызды мәселе. Алғашқы көзқараста төмен жалақы мен мансаптық өсу мүмкіндіктерінің шектеулігі негізгі қиындықтар болып көрінуі мүмкін, бірақ қызметкерлердің қалу немесе жұмыстан шығу шешіміне әсер ететін негізгі себептер жеткілікті зерттелмеген. Бұл зерттеудің мақсаты – жұмыс жағдайларының әкімшілік қызметкерлердің ауысуына қалай әсер ететінін зерттеу және қазақстандық университеттерде кездесетін негізгі мәселелерді анықтау болды. Атап айтқанда, қызметкерлерді ұстап қалуға олардың әсерін анықтау мақсатында жұмысқа қанағаттану, мойындау, көшбасшылық стилі, мансаптық перспективалар, жалақы және кадр саясаты сияқты тақырыптар зерттелді. Зерттеу сапалы әдіснамаға негізделіп, жеке және автономды университеттерден он әкімшілік қызметкермен жартылай құрылымдалған сұхбаттар жүргізілді. Мәліметтерді талдауда тақырыптық талдау әдісі қолданылды. Зерттеу нәтижелері жұмыс жағдайлары жалпы алғанда қанағаттанарлық болғанымен, мансаптық өсудің болмауы немесе баяу жүруі, ұжым ішіндегі шиеленіс, жалақы және иерархиялық шешім қабылдау құрылымы наразылыққа әкелетінін көрсетті. Автономды оқу орындарының қызметкерлері жоғары әлеуметтік жеңілдіктерді атап өтсе, жеке университет қызметкерлері жұмыс жағдайларының икемділігін ерекше бағалаған. Екі түрлі университеттің айырмашылықтарына қарамастан, мансаптық өсуді қалау барлық қатысушыларға ортақ болды. Зерттеу қызметкерлердің тұрақтылығын арттыру үшін жұмысқа орналасудың бастапқы кезеңінен бастап құрылымды мансаптық жолдарды енгізу сияқты нақты жағдайларға бейімделген ұсыныстар береді.

Негізгі терминдер: қызметкерлердің тұрақтылығы, жұмысқа қанағаттану, кадр ауысуы, жұмыс жағдайлары, жоғары оқу орны

Абстракт

Удержание административного персонала в высших учебных заведениях (ВУЗах) представляет собой важную проблему в связи с ее влиянием на эффективность работы учреждения. На первый взгляд может показаться что такие факторы как низкая заработная плата и ограниченные возможности карьерного роста, могут показаться основными трудностями, но, основные причины, влияющие на решение сотрудников остаться или уволиться, остаются недостаточно изученными. Целью данного исследования является изучить, как условия труда влияют на текучесть административного персонала, а также выявить основные проблемы, с которыми они сталкиваются в казахстанских университетах. В частности, были исследованы такие темы, как удовлетворенность работой, признание, стиль руководства, карьерные перспективы, заработная плата и кадровая политика, чтобы определить их влияние на удержание сотрудников. В исследовании использовалась качественная методология: были проведены полу структурированные интервью с десятью административными сотрудниками из частного и автономного университетов. Для анализа данных применялся тематический анализ. Результаты показали, что, несмотря на общую приемлемость условий труда, отсутствие или медленный карьерный рост, напряженность в коллективе, заработная плата и иерархические структуры принятия решений способствовали неудовлетворенности. Сотрудники автономных ВУЗов отмечали более высокие социальные льготы, в то время как сотрудники частных университетов подчеркивали гибкость условий труда. Несмотря на различия между двумя типами университетов, стремление к карьерному росту были общими для всех участников. В завершение исследование предлагает рекомендации, адаптированные к конкретным условиям, включая более структурированный карьерный путь с начала трудоустройства.

Ключевые слова: удержание персонала, удовлетворенность работой, текучесть кадров, условия труда, высшее учебное заведение.

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Retention of Administrative Staff in Higher Education Institutions in Kazakhstan (HEIs)

Chapter 1

Introduction to the Study

1.1 Introduction

This chapter introduced the study on the retention of administrative staff in higher education institutions in Kazakhstan. In any country, education was a system-forming one, where competent personnel were trained for the country's sustainable development. Kazakhstan was no exception, and education played an important role in national development. However, for complex reasons, higher education in Kazakhstan had its problems. Higher education institutions (HEI) have allowed the phenomenon of high turnover among administrators and faculty to become a cultural norm within business practice, contributing significantly to operational disruptions and increased workplace costs (Figueroa, 2015, p. 86). One of the problems was the turnover of administrative staff in HEIs. The administrative staff was one of the foundations of any HEI and it was hard to function without them. And so, inadequately assessing this problem or ignoring it, in the future might affect higher education. To better understand the causes of administrative staff turnover, this study used Herzberg's two-factor theory as a theoretical basis. The Herzberg model explained the difference between hygienic factors such as salary and working conditions, which prevented dissatisfaction, and motivators such as recognition and growth opportunities, which promoted job satisfaction and long-term commitment (Herzberg, 1966; Wall & Stephenson, 1970). This theory served as the basis for this work to understand what factors could help to prevent staff turnover. This chapter proceeded by presenting the background of the study and the research problem. The research purpose and questions, and the significance of the study were also discussed.

1.2 Background to the Study

Since gaining independence, Kazakhstan's HEIs have been modernised. For instance, participation in the Bologna process, collaborations, and opening international branches of foreign universities such as De Montfort University, University of Arizona, etc. (Ministry of Science and Higher Education Republic of Kazakhstan, 2023) could be noted. Progress was hampered by issues such as regulatory constraints, limited autonomy of educational institutions, and pervasive bureaucratic practices. Figueroa (2015, p. 86) discussed the consequences of staff turnover in HEIs, and how it affected the educational institution itself. This phenomenon didn't specifically concern one educational institution but was widespread everywhere. Staff retention was important due to the numerous negative outcomes associated with labour turnover. These organisational outcomes included high direct and indirect financial costs, a decrease in financial sustainability, a decrease in productivity, the rendering of service and standards, interruption in workflow, loss of experience and specialist knowledge, an increase in administrative processes, a decline in the organisations' image, an interruption in the internal and informal social liaison and communication channels and an increased feeling of job dissatisfaction among the remaining staff (Ng'ethe, 2013; Pienaar et al., 2008). In the context of Kazakhstani HEIs, considering these factors was important to improve administrative staff retention. Staff turnover was associated with various underlying factors, including job dissatisfaction and lack of proper engagement, which were important to consider in increasing staff retention.

1.3 Research Problem

The main problem in this study was administrative staff turnover in Kazakhstani HEIs. High staff turnover among administrative staff led to increased recruitment and training costs, loss of institutional knowledge, and a decrease in the quality of service. In Kazakhstani HEIs, there was a tendency for employees to leave their jobs. In a study about

human resource management in education, Moreira and Machado (2023, p. 85) mentioned poor working conditions as one of the factors contributing to staff turnover. The study discussed how poor working conditions and inadequate pay contributed to high staff turnover. This study about human resource management highlighted that wage delays, especially in developing countries, and insufficient investment in schools were critical issues leading to dissatisfaction and staff turnover. Poor working conditions, including inadequate remuneration and delayed wages, were persistent causes that negatively affected staff retention. Additionally, Heckert and Farabee (2006) found that salary was important in explaining turnover considerations in HEIs.

The problem of staff turnover was not a local problem but was widespread in many HEIs in Kazakhstan. Zharkeshova et al. (2017) paid attention to the influence of organisational culture. As in the civil service, Kazakhstani universities faced difficulties from the organisational culture, which implied excessive bureaucracy and limited opportunities for professional growth, which led to dissatisfaction and staff turnover among the administrative staff. For instance, in the data collected by Zharkeshova (2017), 100% of respondents noted that traditional behaviour prevailed in the workplace, in which hierarchy prevailed in decision-making and concentration on bureaucratic procedures, which negatively affected the perception of employees. Furthermore, research also showed that one of the causes of stress among employees at work was high demands on key performance indicators. As Mukasheva (2022) noted in the study, key performance indicators increased stress in the workplace due to a lack of support from management. This problem, in turn, led to staff turnover, which we could also see in Kazakhstani universities, where administrative staff faced similar difficulties.

Staff turnover in any organisation was a problem that affected the stability of educational institutions. And the presence of bureaucracy complicated these problems. It was

important to solve these problems to maintain the quality of education at Kazakhstani HEIs. By providing context-specific information and practical recommendations, this study aimed to fill a critical gap in the literature and contribute to the development of effective strategies for staff retention in Kazakhstani HEIs.

1.4 Research Purpose and Questions

This study explored the key factors influencing administrative staff retention in Kazakhstani HEIs. By examining stakeholders' experiences, this study provided insight into the factors that contribute to or interfere with administrative staff's long-term commitment to their profession and identified the causes and possible solutions to problems affecting administrative staff retention in Kazakhstani HEIs. The following research questions guided this study:

1. How do working conditions influence turnover patterns among administrative staff in higher education institutions (HEIs) in Kazakhstan?
2. What key challenges contribute to turnover among administrative staff in Kazakhstani higher education institutions?

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study was important because identifying the causes and possible solutions to administrative staff turnover in Kazakhstani universities could help solve the problems of retaining university staff. Many authors argued that staff turnover negatively affected the educational institution, thereby slowing down the process and increasing the cost of normal functioning. By examining the main factors contributing to high staff turnover and identifying ways to retain employees, this study aimed to provide valuable information that could serve as a basis for strategic measures to retain staff.

Firstly, high staff turnover undermined universities' normal functioning and financial stability. According to Figueroa (2015), university staff turnover led to significant disruptions in work and increased job costs. The author claimed that staff turnover and the solution to this problem cost sixty-eight million dollars in US universities in 2008. Considering that this was a problem with a large amount of money, the solution would help to stabilise the waste of money, which was important for the long-term functioning of HEIs. To prevent such risks, it was important to estimate things like wages, working conditions, career growth, and relationships with supervisors and colleagues, as these elements influenced employees' decisions to stay at work or quit. Heckert and Farabi (2006) found that the three main factors that influenced staff turnover were satisfaction with pay, job satisfaction, and workload. This study argued that to improve employee retention, management needed to pay attention to these factors.

Human resource management was important in employee experience. The human resource management department was the structure that gave new potential employees a vision of how they would work, on what and with whom. Also, what kind of work conditions were offered and a clear understanding of their career path. Poor working conditions, bureaucratic overload, and lack of recognition of employees were constant causes of high staff turnover, as emphasised by Moreira and Machado (2022). This study provided a recommendation for HEIs to implement personnel management systems and methods which could be useful for employee retention. By identifying the causes of dissatisfaction, universities could improve the necessary aspects and create a favourable work environment for retaining administrative staff. Liu et al. (2012) emphasised the importance of understanding changes in job satisfaction over time and made informed management decisions such as promotions, performance feedback, salary changes, benefits and job change, among others.

High staff turnover posed a significant strategic risk for HEIs, as it disrupted the continuity of institutional knowledge and affected long-term operational efficiency. As Figueroa (2015) noted, staff turnover led to a drain on institutional knowledge and a decrease in labour productivity, which in the end reduced the ability of an institution to achieve its strategic goals. The loss of qualified staff not only increased operational costs but also weakened the institutional structure, making it difficult to maintain consistent practices and the quality of services provided. This study contributed to solving the turnover problem by examining the reasons why employees decided to continue working at the same educational institution or change their place of work. By identifying the reasons that could help keep employees in one educational institution, the conclusions identified in this particular study might help solve the problem of staff turnover. The conclusions of this study would be useful, first, to university leaders and specialists in human resource management.

This study might also be useful for stakeholders in the higher education field. The findings of this study provided important information to university leaders and human resource specialists. When educational leaders understand the essence of the problem of high turnover of administrative staff and its possible solutions, they could develop more effective strategies and methods aimed at retaining staff, ensuring smooth operation and improving the institution's efficiency. Students were perhaps the most important stakeholders to benefit from this research. Reduced staff turnover could lead to better student service, more consistent support, and an improved overall student experience. This meant that students would have minimal problems with the service within the walls of the university. This stability was very important for student satisfaction and success, which in the end contributed to better learning outcomes. Human resource climate has a positive effect on faculty retention through organisational commitment and organizational trust as partial complementary mediators. (Verma & Kaur, 2024) The next stakeholders to benefit from this study were

human resource specialists. One of the main goals of the human resource department was to achieve employee commitment to the organisation and reduce staff turnover. Human resource management needed this study because it provided them with data-based information on effective strategies to increase staff satisfaction and reduce staff turnover. This knowledge would be necessary to develop targeted staff retention programs that would meet the specific needs of administrative staff in Kazakhstani universities. If we considered the benefits of this research outside the university, it would help the government and regional education authorities, since administrative staff turnover affected the country's broader educational goals. The recommendations of this study could serve as a basis for public policy in the higher education field, especially in areas related to workforce development and institutional management.

There was a limited number of studies investigating staff retention in the Kazakhstani context. This study complemented the limited literature about staff retention in Kazakhstani HEIs. By providing context-specific information, this study filled the gap in existing research and offered practical recommendations for improving staff retention. Ng'ethe (2013) wrote about the importance of leadership style. So, these findings might help the educational institutions' heads to develop policies that would increase retention rates and reduce the factors leading to job dissatisfaction. Takawira et al. (2014) also noted that higher job satisfaction led to lower staff turnover, which contributed to the need for a job satisfaction-promoting policy to retain administrative staff.

In this way, it could help stakeholders obtain the necessary information to improve the retention of administrative staff from this study. The information received was primarily useful for the university management, who will be less likely to face the departure of an employee from the institution. This study was also useful for human resource professionals who received additional information to improve their strategy for working with current and

future employees. By identifying the main causes of staff turnover and suggesting retention strategies, this study helped achieve long-term strategic goals to improve the quality of education.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter provided an overview of the literature on job satisfaction and its impact on turnover intention. This chapter presented an overview of poor working conditions and finally an overview of the lack of support and recognition. This review was done to examine existing research papers on the retention of administrative staff in universities, including topics such as job satisfaction and its impact on staff turnover, poor working conditions, lack of support and recognition. The decision to study the above factors is based on a better understanding of the nature of staff turnover problems.

Retaining staff at work means that a person stayed at work or intended to continue working with a certain educational institution. According to Todorovski and Atanasoska (2014), staff retention was when an institution's need for a good specialist and the specialist's needs were aligned while giving double benefits. Pitman (2000) described the perception of administrative staff, emphasising the importance of recognising employees as customers to improve staff retention. Koonkongsatian (2017) defined administrative support as important for staff retention, especially for special education teachers, emphasising the role of operational support in maintaining staff well-being and motivation.

All the above definitions of retention emphasised the recognition of the role of staff as an integral part of the organisation and the provision of support. When we summarized all these statements, we could say that retention in the higher education system could be defined as the process of strategically aligning the goals of an institution with the needs of staff for professional and personal growth, which was facilitated by recognising their role as internal clients and providing comprehensive administrative support. Such methods could have a

positive impact on work in the future, which would have a positive effect on institutional stability and the quality of education.

2.2 Job Satisfaction and its Impact on Turnover Intentions

In many studies, job satisfaction was often considered a decisive factor influencing the intentions of administrative staff regarding staff turnover in HEIs. For instance, Heckert and Farabee's (2006) research has shown that satisfaction with pay, the job, and the teaching/service workload collectively explained 26% of the differences in staff turnover intentions. This showed that to retain an employee, it was necessary to maintain their satisfaction. In research, career prospects were often noted as one of the main factors that increased employee satisfaction. Guyo (2023) cited an analogy between intrinsic (hygiene) factors and Maslow's pyramid, arguing that salary couldn't increase job satisfaction because it was a basic human need. But a competitive salary would prevent the possibility of job dissatisfaction. Therefore, to increase job satisfaction, which could improve staff retention, it was necessary to increase extrinsic factors (motivators), such as professional recognition and achievements (Guyo, 2023). Research also showed that by observing employee engagement, it was possible to find out whether employees were satisfied or not. Wagner (2006) argued that conducting training or special employee development programs could increase employee engagement, which in turn would increase job satisfaction.

Liu et al. (2012) in a quantitative study demonstrated a trajectory of job satisfaction, where we could see that job satisfaction decreases over time. The purpose of this study was for employers to become familiar with this and take measures to increase employee satisfaction to improve employee retention. Ng'ethe (2013) used Herzberg's two-factor theory to analyse qualitative factors influencing faculty retention in Kenyan public universities. The study emphasised the importance of leadership style, staff training, career growth and employee reward that affected employee retention. Educational institution leaders could use

these results to develop policies that would increase motivation and reduce factors leading to job dissatisfaction.

2.3 Poor Working Conditions

The OECD report (2020) described the conditions under which high teacher satisfaction is achieved in Kazakhstan. The roles of working conditions and stress were also described in detail in this report. For instance, the report noted that when teachers were more active and could make school decisions, and when their desire to develop professionally was supported, such teachers were usually more satisfied. Moreover, this report also showed in which cases an employee who has just got a job could increase job satisfaction. For example, after conducting a study in 12 countries, in which teachers who completed an introductory course at their first job tended to be more satisfied with their work. In addition, Snyman and Ferreira (2023) revealed the socio-demographic factors influencing employee retention through a cross-sectional quantitative study. In this work, the authors noted the importance of reconciling staff preferences with the organisation's obligations. If socio-demographic differences were considered in the workplace, this could help in creating a more individual and effective staff retention policy. King et al. (2018) presented a qualitative study of career changes in academia through thematic analysis. In this research, four main points needed to be understood and considered to improve the employee retention process. These were the reasons for the transition, initial experience, expectation management and institutional support. Also, if leaders seriously considered socio-demographic factors, this might lead to the development of individual retention strategies that took into account the personal needs of the administrative staff. In turn, an analysis of the experience of administrative staff during the transition period gave an idea of how to develop support systems that met the different expectations and experiences of employees. One of the many reasons why employees quit was the workload. Often, overwork by employees led to negative consequences, which ended

in dismissal. Workload was an increase in the number of work assignments. This was one of the sources of mental stress for employees (Said, 2018). Ohunakin (2024) identified the factors that made the administrative staff vulnerable to voluntary turnover. Participants emphasised the top 3 reasons for voluntary turnover such reasons as poor remuneration (99.1/100), poor fringe benefits (97.4/100) and inconstant promotion (87/100)

Page (2020) argued that the workflow in the clinic and a well-defined organisational structure played an important role in improving staff retention. The introduction of an improved and more structured workflow could feel like a daunting task, and certainly, one that would take some time to get used to, however, the long-term benefits far outweigh any perceived short-term irritations. Using specified and defined routines could hugely improve team well-being and the opportunity for a better work-life balance (Page, 2020). As an example, explaining in detail, the author listed such ways as a specified shift pattern, specified rotations, shared responsibility, increased workflow efficiency, and clearly defined systems.

Bala and Jayavardhini (2018) conducted a study and identified factors influencing employee retention in HEIs in Thanjavur, India. The research identified factors that significantly affected employee retention, including career growth potential, employee empowerment, employee training, employee compensation, employee commitment, performance evaluation, work-life balance, and job security. Among all the above factors, career growth has proven to be the most influential on employee retention. This statement is also supported by the findings of Tnay et al. (2013), who stated that many employees chose to stay at work for career opportunities and potential promotions, and when these expectations were met, job satisfaction increased. Lee (1988) identified the characteristics that led to satisfaction: immediate supervision, kind of work, amount of work, interactions with coworkers, physical conditions, compensation, career future and company identification.

These were the aspects that employees were seeking while looking for a job, and employers needed to make these aspects clear and assure employees.

2.4 Lack of Support and Recognition

Zamri et al. (2022) on the topic of retention defined employee retention as the process of encouraging employees to stay in an organisation for a longer period of time or until the completion of a project and that the lack of support from management was one of the reasons for employee dissatisfaction. The authors also claimed that by supporting their subordinates, an employer could improve an employee's performance at work. These results were consistent with research by Bala and Jayavardhini (2018), who advised that recognising an employee's achievements would give employees an idea that they are worthy of attention and are part of the same organisation. Research by these authors proved that if organisations achieved employee satisfaction, they were able to improve employee retention policies.

Erasmus et al. (2015) described the problems of HEIs with staff retention. It was difficult for HEIs to compete with the private sector, so when university staff were invited to the private sector with better conditions, employees often decided to leave for another job. The authors of this study conducted a structured questionnaire of university staff and took staff turnover data. The analysis showed that staff turnover was at 4.34%, which is an acceptable level. Employees answered questions about the reasons why they might want to leave based on such factors as leadership, civic position in the organisation, remuneration, interpersonal relationships, and employee values. Employee departure data showed that 25% of employees intended to leave because of leadership or relationships with management. In this study, universities were advised to improve the organisational climate, that is, leadership and support from management.

In the context of Kazakhstan, there was limited literature on the retention of administrative staff. Without detailed, context-specific research on administrative staff

retention in Kazakhstan, it was complicated to understand the scale of this problem. That's why, this would require conducting local research that considered various aspects of staff retention in Kazakhstan, such as economic constraints, cultural expectations, and workflow processes. This was important not only from the point of view of academic interest but also from a practical point of view. Policymakers and educational leaders after receiving the guidance, would be able to develop strategies that would work in this local context, considering the specific factors affecting staff retention in Kazakhstani universities.

2.5 Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory

The two-factor theory of Herzberg served as the theoretical framework for this study. This theory discussed factors that could increase job satisfaction, but their absence would not lead to dissatisfaction. These were: achievements, career advancement, recognition, responsibility, and the job itself, which meant that if these factors were present, they could contribute to job satisfaction. The author called all these motivators. Next, the author wrote about hygienic factors. The author explained that the presence of hygiene factors didn't increase job satisfaction, but their absence would lead to job dissatisfaction. These factors included wages, working conditions, and company policy (Herzberg, 1966; Wall and Stephenson 1970). This theory could be applied to this study since the theory was not tied to the specific differences of a particular country but is universal. The conceptual framework provided a structured approach to analysing how these factors affected staff satisfaction, through which strategies could be identified that would help retain administrative staff. Modern research has confirmed that this theory was relevant. Sachau (2007) argued that even though organisational intervention methods have evolved over the past fifty years, Herzberg's theory was still relevant, arguing that internal motivation factors still played an important role in increasing employee commitment, while insufficient compliance with hygiene standards increased staff turnover. Recent studies have also confirmed the relevance of this theory in

different sectors. For instance, in correctional institutions, retail, and the telecommunications industry. Research showed that working conditions strongly influenced job satisfaction, while unequal remuneration or lack of communication with other departments led to dissatisfaction, which is a hygienic factor (Mitsakis and Galanakis, 2022). Thus, the Herzberg theory for this study provided a foundation through which it was possible to determine what influences the satisfaction and dissatisfaction of administrative staff to improve employee retention systems in educational institutions.

2.6 Summary

This literature review examined the factors influencing the retention of administrative staff in HEIs. Staff retention was defined as the alignment of the institution's goals with the professional and personal needs of employees. Job satisfaction influenced staff turnover intentions. Career opportunities and working conditions were important for maintaining job satisfaction. The literature also emphasised the importance of leadership support and recognition. Herzberg's two-factor theory provided a theoretical framework by distinguishing between motivating factors and hygienic factors that affected job satisfaction in different ways.

Chapter 3

Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The study was guided by the following research design, where I justified the choice of a qualitative approach for understanding the experience of administrative staff. Next, the sampling selection process was explained highlighting the purposive sampling strategy used to ensure a diverse and representative sample. The chapter then discussed data collection methods, including semi-structured interviews, which were chosen for their ability to collect extensive and detailed data. The process of data analysis was also explained, with an emphasis on thematic analysis as the main method of identifying patterns and themes in the collected data. Finally, ethical considerations related to the conduct of the study are considered, which guarantees that the study was conducted in compliance with the rights and safety of all participants. This chapter provided an overview of the methodological framework underlying this study, which ensured its reliability.

3.2 Research Design

According to Creswell (2007), when it was necessary to understand the nature and details of a problem, we conducted qualitative research. And these details could only be achieved by talking and giving people the opportunity to speak out. Therefore, this study used a qualitative research approach to understand the factors influencing administrative staff retention in Kazakhstani HEIs. This study design was chosen because it allowed me to study the experience and perception of people in-depth, who had an important role in understanding the complex and context-dependent nature of staff retention problems. This approach facilitated the collection of extensive and detailed data that could provide insight into the factors contributing to high staff turnover and strategies that could be used to improve staff retention. The design of the study also included the use of semi-structured interviews. Semi-

structured interviews were a flexible format that allowed me to identify new topics and ideas during the interview. Since in this study, I would need to know the experience and opinions of specialists in the field of higher education, the use of semi-structured interviews seemed appropriate.

3.3 Sampling and Participants

Ten participants took part in the study. The selected study participants were administrative staff from two universities. Guest, et al. (2006) concluded that when conducting qualitative research, twelve interviews were enough for the researchers to obtain sufficient information. For instance, they received 92% of the codes after the first twelve interviews. Therefore, interviews with ten participants allowed me to study the experience of the administrative staff of Kazakhstani HEIs well. Semi-structured interviews made it possible to understand the individual experiences, and the sample size of ten participants was sufficient to collect detailed data and identify a pattern. Also, this sample size allowed the study to reflect the main problems in the target group. The selected study participants were administrative staff from two universities - one private and one autonomous university. Participants included staff in various administrative positions, with different work experience and representing different types of institutions to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the factors affecting staff retention. The concept of purposeful sampling was used in qualitative research. That meant that the inquirer selects individuals and sites for study because they could purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study (Creswell, 2007). To recruit participants, in this study, I used a purposive sampling method. In research, purposive sampling was used to select specific people for a specific question. The reason for purposive sampling was the better matching of the sample to the aims and objectives of the research, thus improving the rigour of the study and the trustworthiness of the data and results. (Campbell et al., 2020). This strategy ensured

that the sample included people with different experiences and views on life, which helped to uncover this topic. There were also several criteria for the selection of participants:

1. The employee must have worked in an administrative position in Kazakhstan for at least one year.
2. To get more detailed data, participants were from a private, and autonomous university. Five participants were from an autonomous university, and five were from a private university.
3. The employee must have worked at another educational institution in the past.

The choice of this sampling strategy was supported by the work of Liu et al. (2012), who emphasised the importance of understanding job satisfaction trajectories over time. One of the objectives of the study was to compile a picture of the factors affecting staff retention by selecting participants with different work experiences.

3.4 Research Site

The study was conducted in two cities of Kazakhstan, Astana and Almaty in two universities. Creswell (2007) argued that the study participants might be located at a single site or from several, but more importantly, they have experienced the same phenomenon and formulated according to their life experiences. The study was conducted in two universities in Kazakhstan: private, and autonomous. For qualitative research, it was argued that the representation of diversity is often important (Allmark, 2004). The reason why specific educational institutions were selected was to ensure a representative sample of the two types of universities in Kazakhstan. This allowed the study to identify differences in the experience of administrative staff in different types of institutions and geographical locations.

3.5 Data Collection Methods

The use of semi-structured interviews was supported by the work of Kallio et al. (2016) who emphasised that a semi-structured interview allowed the interviewer to be

flexible during the interview, which also allowed the interviewer to improvise moments based on the interviewee's answers. The interview guide was developed based on key topics identified in the literature review, such as job satisfaction, working conditions, support and recognition, and HR management practices. Using this method was convenient for flexibly approaching the study of specific areas of interest as they arose during interviews. The interview questions were listed in the appendix B. After getting permission to interview the participants from the institutions were invited to participate in semi-structured interviews to share their experiences and thoughts about job satisfaction, corporate culture, relationship with management, salary, well-being, and work-life balance. With the consent of the interview participants, audio was recorded and transcribed literally for data analysis. For those who declined to be audio-recorded, I took notes.

The main tool that was used to collect data was semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews incorporated both open-ended and more theoretically driven questions, eliciting data grounded in the experience of the participant as well as data guided by existing constructs in the particular discipline within which one was conducting research (Harris, 2018). This tool enabled me to collect detailed data and contribute to an in-depth study of participants' experiences. According to Gill et al. (2008), semi-structured interviews helped the interviewer or interviewee deviate from the topic to develop an idea or answer in more detail. Thus, semi-structured interviews allowed me to be more flexible and not always follow a pre-written template so that the researcher had the opportunity to supplement the questions.

3.6 Data Analysis

The interview data was analysed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis was described as a qualitative research method that that widely used in various epistemologies and research issues (Nowell, 2017). Thematic analysis was used to identify, analyse,

organise, describe, and present topics in a dataset. To analyse, thematic analysis was used in this study, as this method of analysis was convenient in identifying patterns and defining themes. Before starting the analysis, I reviewed and reread the collected data. This decision was made because, after the interview, many details could be forgotten. After reviewing the transcript, data coding began. While coding the data, I marked the important words of the interview participants, which seemed to reflect the nature of the text. During the data analysis, there were no predefined categories, so the coding was inductive. After the coding process was over, the next step was to combine the codes into themes. After naming the themes, it was discussed how these themes relate to the research question. NVivo was used for the analysis to make the data analysis process convenient and accurate. This software offered a user-friendly interface, coding tools, and workflow organisation.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

Ethics is a set of principles that define correct and acceptable behaviour (Misra & Tyagi, 2019). To ensure the safety, anonymity and voluntary participation in this study, ethical measures were taken to ensure that the study was conducted with respect for all involved participants. Data collection started once I got the approval from NUGSE Ethics Committee. The study was conducted in strict accordance with the ethical principles established by the Ethics Committee regarding the consent of participants, data confidentiality and ethical presentation of findings. This approval process ensured that my research met the necessary ethical standards and that participants were protected throughout the research process.

In any qualitative research involving human subjects, the protection of people through the application of ethical principles was important due to the in-depth nature of the research process (Arifin, 2018). All administrative staff received a hard copy or an email containing the consent form. All participants got acquainted with the purposes, objectives, and

procedures of the study and any potential risks or benefits. It was also important to maintain the anonymity and confidentiality of participants (Arifin, 2018). The confidentiality and anonymity of the study participants were ensured from the beginning of the recruitment process, where participants also knew that the study was voluntary and they had the right to leave the study at any time convenient for them. Along with that, all personal data, participant names and educational institution names were coded. In addition to maintaining anonymity, all measures were taken to ensure the collected data remains confidential (Lin, 2009). To ensure that only the researcher had access to the data, all data has been saved in a folder with a secure password. So that no one knew that the interviewee was being interviewed, the entire data collection process took place in an informal setting as well, depending on the preferences of the participant, online interviews were conducted through online platforms, such as Zoom and Google Meet. Possible difficulties in maintaining confidentiality were that people could identify the position of the administrative staff, so the positions and names of HEIs were not indicated in the data analysis.

The dignity and rights of all participants were also respected during the study. As a researcher, I understood that sensitive topics such as job dissatisfaction and workplace issues might be raised during data collection. Therefore, as a researcher, I approached all interactions with caution. During the interviews, participants had the right to choose. Participants were invited to openly share their experiences, but they also were allowed to refuse to answer any questions they found uncomfortable. The data collection process considered the participants' schedules, which ensured that data was collected at a convenient time and place convenient for them.

During the study, all necessary precautions were taken to avoid any inconvenience to participants. This study posed a minimal risk because all the participants were older than eighteen and worked in HEIs. Discussing topics such as job dissatisfaction, workplace

problems, reasons why they would resign from their position or problems at work could cause a feeling of stress and discomfort for the interviewee. As a researcher, I was aware that data collection often exposes the participants as a group to a huge range of risks that could harm their personal, professional, social, and cultural worlds (Butler et al., 2017). Also, despite all precautions, participants might worry regarding their job security, especially participants who may fear that their opinions or experiences may be brought to their attention and potentially affect their employment status. Therefore, participants had an opportunity to skip any questions that made them feel uncomfortable. I was attentive to participants' emotional reactions during interviews, if necessary, and provided an opportunity to stop participation. Moreover, the findings were presented in a way that does not compromise the job security of the participants or the reputation of the relevant institutions, thereby minimising any potential negative impact.

Finally, regarding transparency and integrity, these qualities were the main principles of this study. Participants were fully informed about the objectives of the study, and there was no falsehood regarding the purpose of the study. As a researcher, I committed myself to accurately and objectively report the findings of the study, recognising any limitations and potential conflicts of interest. By following these ethical considerations, this study aimed to conduct a respectful analysis of the practice of administrative staff retention in Kazakhstani HEIs, which provided the necessary information, while ensuring the protection of the rights of all participants.

3.8 Summary

This study used a qualitative research approach to study the factors influencing the retention of administrative staff in Kazakhstani higher education institutions. In Almaty and Astana, ten participants were selected from two types of universities using purposive sampling that provided a variety of experiences. The data was collected through semi-

structured interviews, which allowed for a broad examination of participants' experiences regarding job satisfaction and working conditions. To identify patterns and themes in the data, a thematic analysis was conducted using NVivo software for coding and organisation. With the approval of the NUGSE Ethics Committee, priority was given to ethical considerations, which ensured the anonymity, confidentiality and voluntary participation of participants. This method has provided a foundation for understanding the dynamics of administrative staff retention in Kazakhstani universities.

Chapter 4

Findings

4.1. Introduction

This chapter presented the conclusions of the data collected from the university administrative staff interviews to determine how work conditions affected administrative staff turnover and what the primary challenges administrative staff faced in Kazakhstani HEIs were. The thematic analysis approach has been used in previous research on administrative staff retention. For instance, King et al. (2018) used thematic analysis to systematise the collected interviews. Thematic analysis was chosen because it provided flexibility in analysing complex qualitative data and was especially useful for identifying, analysing, and presenting information about patterns in data.

4.2 Description of Participants

This study included ten participants, seven females and three males with different years of experience as administrative staff in HEIs so that they could share their different experiences. Below is a description of the participants. This table also shows the years of experience of the participants.

Table 1.

Characteristics of Interview Participants.

Participant	Gender	Years of Experience	University
Aisana	F	13	Private
Baibek	M	13	Private
Kamilla	F	2	Autonomous
Zarina	F	1	Autonomous
Aslan	M	3	Autonomous
Kanat	M	2	Private
Lana	F	9	Private
Aigul	F	3	Private
Diana	F	6	Autonomous
Gaziza	F	1,5	Autonomous

Summary of Themes

To study the personal experience of administrative staff in HEIs, this study used a thematic analysis to analyse the data. After coding all the data I received, I identified two main topics: 4.3 The working conditions of the administrative staff and 4.4 The problems faced by the administrative staff. To expand on these two topics in detail, I have also added nine sub-topics: administrative staff experience, working conditions, job satisfaction factors, job benefits and institutional support, leadership and corporate culture, work challenges, conflict resolution and job dissatisfaction, turnover factors and recommendations for improvement. The first main topic, “Working conditions of administrative staff,” described the conditions in which employees worked, what bonuses they received, what kind of corporate culture they had, and in general, they talked about their work experience at educational institutions. The second main topic, “Challenges faced by administrative staff”, described what kind of difficulties administrative staff faced in daily routine at their work, the possible implementations to improve the working conditions and what they are missing.

4.3 Working Conditions of Administrative Staff

4.3.1 Administrative Staff Experience

This section examined the experience of administrative staff working at the university, how they perceived their experience and what they faced. All the participants shared their work and the data varied depending on the year of experience. The participants shared what they faced daily, and what roles they performed. For instance, Kamilla described what she faced when she switched from being a student to being an administrative employee. She called the operational tasks “truly challenging” because of the paperwork, but at the same time praised her work for being able to act as a “bridge between students and administration who is on the top of our institution.”

Aigul noted that in their work, work and personal life were separated: “If work ends at 5.30, then it ends at 5.30, that is, you do not need to come home and think about work.”

Gaziza also noted a lighter atmosphere about work than in school or other places: “It's like the atmosphere is lighter here. There is such a vibe atmosphere compared to NIS.” Aslan talked in detail about his work with socially vulnerable students, allocating dormitories, organising events, and working with the military calling these tasks significant. Kanat worked in the human resource department and expressed satisfaction with his role in hiring employees, especially “closing difficult vacancies,” which, in his opinion, was very motivating. Diana was satisfied with their work in the scientific library, telling about their responsibilities, such as book purchases, book registration, quality control and work with other departments.

The interview participants also shared their opinions on why they chose to work in higher education institutions. Most of them were attracted to the academic environment. For instance, Baibek noted the “academic environment” and “bit of creative freedom” compared to other sectors, while Aslan emphasised the university's reputation in Kazakhstan, as it was the best educational institution.

Some participants decided to work in higher education institutions for reasons of personal development. Aisana emphasised the possibility of applying the skills, knowledge and experience acquired in previous positions, stating: “I can implement the skills, knowledge and experience that I have acquired.” Similarly, Kanat viewed his position as a way to find out if he would enjoy teaching in the future, cause this participant emphasised about wish to work as a teacher at university in the future. Gaziza mentioned about academic experience in the education management field as a motivator, noting that working in a higher education institution corresponded to her master's degree.

Others saw their role as an opportunity for growth. Aigul described her initial decision as somewhat accidental, as she did not plan to work in her position for a long time. But in the end, because her position allowed her to “develop comprehensively” this participant decided to continue working in the higher education field.

Also, relationships with supervisors influenced the work experience of the interview participants. Many noted a favourable working environment. Diana emphasised the positive atmosphere in her team “The atmosphere within the team is important. There are only five of us in the department, even though we are all different ages. That, it seems to me, is what gives this core of the fact that we are all friendly, all respectful. No matter who you ask for help, everyone helps you.” Similarly, Gaziza explained their decision to stay at the university with an atmosphere of collegiality, stating “I really like my colleagues here, and this is one of the reasons why I am staying.”

Some participants noted problems related to hierarchical structures. Baibek noted differences in management styles from his previous workplace, describing the current one as a “Puritanical model” where the boundaries between management levels were more pronounced. Kamilla emphasised the importance of having a supportive supervisor, stating, “You don't have to choose a job based solely on your career prospects, you also have to choose based on the supervisor.”

4.3.2 Working Conditions

The data collected showed that participants generally noted that the atmosphere at work was positive. Aisana noted that everything was transparent at work regarding wages “I like the salary system, that it is the same for all employees. The grading system is very good.” Baibek compared the current place of work with the previous ones and noted the absence of “underhanded intrigues” and conflicts, which makes the current workplace comfortable from the point of view of ethics. Interview participants from the autonomous organisation praised

the benefits provided by their higher education institution. The participants noted that health insurance and premiums were very comfortable for them. For instance, Kamilla stated, “I believe in terms of convenience it is super great because the company offers a lot of different opportunities for their workers”. Other participants also noted a convenient working time schedule, for example, Gaziza said “I really like schedules, because traffic jams start starting at 6:00, and at 5.30 we go out, we don't get caught in traffic.”

In general, all employees of a private and autonomous organisation noted that the physical working conditions are suitable for their work and that they are satisfied with the availability of necessary things for work. The example from Aigul's response, “Our university has the latest equipment, that is, the latest technologies are installed, projectors for images are installed in each office, as well as all the latest types of computers, all-in-ones, equipment, printers, scanners, etc.”, and Diana noted the university's promptness in maintaining and replacing equipment if necessary “all this is eliminated very quickly”. However, there were also an opinion about the limited resources in educational institutions. For instance, Aisana noted, “But there are, difficulties with the space, since the campus is small, and we have quite a lot of students and social workers, about nine thousand in total. It seems to me that there is a little lack of physical space for some meetings and networking”. Despite these limitations, the participants were mostly satisfied with their physical workplaces.

The participants also shared their opinions regarding independence in decision-making. The answers were divided, some said that they had complete creative freedom, and some had no freedom in this. But they all agreed that all decisions, even though they were independent, were consistent with the top management and the direction of the university. For instance, Kanat described his independence in the recruitment process, starting with the publication of vacancies and ending with the selection of candidates. Lana noted that mid-

level management enjoyed considerable freedom in implementing annual operational plans, despite the need for coordination with senior management. Others, on the contrary, described a hierarchical decision-making structure that limited their independence. Aisana emphasised that decisions, as a rule, required approval from management at several levels, which made independent decision-making rare. Aigul acknowledged her independence in managing tasks but noted that there is a tendency in culture to seek board approval before making decisions.

4.3.3 Job Satisfaction Factors

The data showed that administrative staff satisfaction was influenced by factors such as lack of bureaucracy, workplace relationships, wages, independence, and opportunities for professional growth. “The university is not bureaucratic. To resolve certain problems and processes, it was sufficient to write an email or contact them personally by phone.” For instance, Aisana noted the ease of communication within the university, where issues could be solved quickly, without excessive bureaucracy. Kamilla talked about the significance of good communication with colleagues and supervisors, highlighting that a friendly work environment was important for her personal comfort. Salary and workload were also important factors. Zarina noted “Salary, next, the workload.” Similarly, Gaziza acknowledged that although the salary was initially satisfactory, “First of all, it's the salary”. Kamilla from autonomous organisations found motivation in financial incentives, stating “This is a bonus that we get in monetary terms”. Other participants were satisfied with the flexibility of the work. Aslan rated the freedom to manage their schedule while ensuring productivity, explaining: “In the office, the manager gives free business-hours visits. That is, if I work at 8.30, I can do my business until 11, but at the same time we must have results. So, if we can solve students' problems remotely, we can do that too.” Kanat talked about the importance of receiving feedback and a structured package of social benefits, stating “First of all, this is specific feedback. Also, in addition to this, these are direct working conditions. If

the working conditions are good, then the job will be done better.” Aigul emphasised the university environment “It is important how interesting this work is, how much it satisfies your personal needs. For instance, I always like being in an organisation where I am surrounded by young people, that is, students, where they study. It inspires me, and that's why I like coming to work every day.”

Many participants have noticed career growth as one of the important aspects of job satisfaction of administrative staff. Kamilla noted that working at a prestigious university “gives you both perspectives”, it provided career opportunities, but it could also cause “bias” among colleagues because the graduate was from a prestigious university. Diana noted the “in the form of verbal” from the leadership more than a formal promotion, stating “It is important for me that my supervisor is satisfied with the work, encourages me with bonuses or additional responsibilities.” At the same time, Gaziza acknowledged the importance of career growth, saying “Career growth is important”.

The motives for staying in participants' current positions were also different. Aisana said that she liked the opportunity to implement projects quickly, comparing it with her previous job at the same time “Fortunately, a private university can implement quite quickly”, “Compared with the previous university, or a national company, or the commercial sector, there were cases when it took one year to approve one regulation, because of endless approvals, endless bureaucracy.” Kamilla noted the prestige and experience gained at the workplace as the reason why she stayed at work. “Gaining experience is basically my motivation. Getting experience at a prestigious university and improving my resume.” Zarina found her position convenient because it allowed her to combine work with training, while Aigul noted career opportunities and leadership positions.

4.3.4 Job Benefits and Institutional Support

During the interview, it was determined that almost all participants received support from management. Aisana described her experience, stating that “Support is certainly being provided. And it's hard to say if this solves the problems.” She stressed the importance of collective decision-making, explaining “Since this is a collective decision, it needs to be discussed, then discussed again, then reviewed, then agreed with someone, and then brought up for discussion again.” Although the problems were eventually resolved, she noted that “sometimes some tasks are delayed” due to these processes. Similarly, Zarina noted that the management supported her in certain circumstances, especially when she asked for time off “If I contact them in advance, they always try to give me either time off or half a day off. But... I haven't contacted them about any other plans.” Baibek, on the contrary, emphasised not to interfere in his work process, stating: “For me, as for any Tajik, the main thing is that the top managers do not interfere. I'll do the rest myself.” Kanat described how the management gave practical recommendations “If I have a problem with a vacancy, they always give me advice, help me with an elementary position, how to apply for a vacancy in the HR department during an interview, etc.”

4.3.5 Leadership Style and Corporate Culture

Leadership style was one of the important factors that could affect the daily work experience of employees. For instance, some managers provided employees with autonomy and constant feedback, while others relied on authoritarian decision-making from the top down, that is, they made decisions themselves and only notified employees of their organisation about the decisions they made. This difference affected the perception of work among the employees of the organisation in different ways. Along with leadership, corporate culture influenced how employees communicated and solved problems. In some HEIs, the culture of open cooperation promoted the development of a team spirit, while others

emphasised formal hierarchy, which might limit the emotional comfort of administrative staff.

The participants also made it clear that leadership style also affected job satisfaction. Some participants talked about supportive care, while others said that excessive micromanagement led to stress in the workplace. Kanat admitted “Yes, the local leadership is kind and supportive. The fact that I realise that I receive help and trust from leaders gives me a sense of my importance.” In contrast, Aigul noted that “There are times when managers are too critical, well, they want to interfere for good purposes, say, to paint all the details as needed, but at such times it leads to excessive stress at work.”

The participants also noted that the recognition practices in the two higher education institutions were different. Aisana stated that even if she achieved a lot at work and fulfilled all the requirements, unfortunately, “there was no recognition,” she explained this by saying that there was “no cult of personality” at the university. She explained that “if these ideas are heard and accepted, well, how to say, then this is recognition”. Baibek described the lack of open praise, explaining that “if you do your job well, everyone stays silent. That's how it should be.” Gaziza spoke in detail about a new recognition method that was not working correctly “We had a system of KPI called Weekly 10. We set goals for the year and wrote updates every two weeks. At the end of the year, the managers evaluated our progress, and based on this, we could receive a bonus or a salary increase. But something went wrong this year, and everything was just cancelled.” Diana expressed disappointment about the lack of financial encouragement, saying “There is no economic incentive. Verbal encouragement is one thing, but financial incentives are a powerful tool for employee retention.” Lana also said that there was no practical encouragement at work, as well as no verbal gratitude. But at work, top management showed its gratitude only by actions. “I mean, it's probably just a

human conversation, probably a human thank you, and that's it. But they don't thank me, that is, they probably just show me by their behaviour, by their actions”

Leadership style was also important in how employees perceived the workplace. Aisana described “collegial decision-making” as a distinctive feature of university leadership, where decisions were made by committees. They noted that “this creates a strong corporate culture, but at the same time, collective responsibility can turn into irresponsibility.” Baibek found the leadership style “unusual,” stating “I have almost complete freedom in making decisions regarding business processes, but management actively intervenes in the relationships of subordinates.” Kanat responded well to the management of his department, saying, “They give excellent feedback” and “do everything possible for my development.” Aigul appreciated the “understanding” saying that “they always prioritise employee development.” Meanwhile, Diana rated the “lack of complete control,” emphasising that “the work is being done, but without unnecessary pressure.” However, also some participants were unhappy with the decisions of their leadership. For instance, Gaziza was unhappy with the way tasks were distributed, saying, “We were forbidden to hire a new employee when a colleague quit. Instead, the workload was simply redistributed between us without discussion.” She also mentioned the “authoritarian management style,” noting that “decisions were made unilaterally, without discussion.”

Regarding the corporate culture, the staff of a private university said that this was one of the main reasons why they worked there and were satisfied with their work. Aisana noted that “the corporate culture compensates for the disadvantages,” and noted such advantages as “a coffee shop and a tea house.” Zarina, since she was related to both a private and an autonomous organisation, talked about the differences between these two educational organisations. “There was mutual trust at private university and the ability to resolve issues through conversation rather than through rigorous documentation.” However, in an

autonomous organisation, “formal communication is a priority, which makes it difficult to quickly resolve urgent issues.” Lana described in detail how their educational organisation was trying to consolidate employees, saying, “We have money allocated to team building, and not every organisation has it.” She also noted the “family atmosphere,” although she warned that “it is important to respect personal and professional boundaries.”

4.4 Challenges Faced by Administrative Staff

4.4.1 Work Challenges

The interview participants also talked about the difficulties at work. Aisana noted the difficulty of “it takes us an average of three hours a day to get to work,” which limited the ability to do personal chores during lunch breaks. However, she admitted that “we don't stay late, there is a transfer.” Baibek described the supportive approach of management, saying, “You arrive at work on time, you leave work on time. The management is very loyal to family problems.” Kamilla noted that “work-life balance depends on time management,” stating that some projects required extra hours, but overall “it's doable.” Kanat was satisfied with the structure, saying, “They don't force you to redo the work, and you keep doing your job.” However, Gaziza said that sometimes she had problems when “students somehow found my number and called at night.” That is, she sometimes had to work after work hours, which in the end, work interfered with her time.

The participants identified many problems related to work. Aisana pointed to “oversimplification” in middle management, stating that “deadlines are often not met, and people do not look into global or national trends.” Kamilla called “misunderstanding and lack of structure” the main obstacles, explaining that “one can dictate in one way and the other can interpret it in another way.” Zarina described “monotonous work” in which students often request “the same information over and over again.” In general, many employees had no problems with the workload at work. Many noted that everything was balanced, and the work

was going smoothly, and the management was also accommodating when it was necessary to leave work. Here are a few phrases from the participants: “There is no such thing as mandatory overtime.” “You can take a day off if you work on weekends,” while Zarina preferred “moderate work, not too little and not too much.” However, the participants noted that there were busy times when they needed to work a lot. Lana noted that “the start of the academic year, there may be a bit of overloading in terms of the fact that there are new employees”. Aigul described the hard workloads “At such moments after work you leave like a squeezed lemon” Others, such as Gaziza, expressed disappointment about “unclear performance indicators in KPIs and unpaid additional projects.” For some participants, salary, career advancement, and working conditions played a significant role in their job satisfaction. Kamilla emphasized that these factors are “top priority,” explaining that “if you're not satisfied with your work, it's like an alarm signal to me.” She also stated, “I have a career ladder that I should be on in a few years... if I don't see any further steps on that career ladder, then I'll probably look for another position where I won't be underpaid.” The participants also raised several issues related to working conditions. Baibek noted the “lack of space” and “it is difficult to work with the administrative and economic unit.” He explained that “any of our demands to do something for the library requires the participation of senior management to force departments to act.” Aigul pointed to the “uneven workload distribution,” stating that “there are days when we have almost no work, but we still have to sit in the office and create the appearance of employment.”

4.4.2 Conflict Resolution and Job Dissatisfaction

The methods of detecting dissatisfaction differed in the two educational institutions. That is, if it took a long time for an autonomous organisation to leave work and the human resource department tried to convince an employee to stay, then at a private university there were practically no mechanisms for retaining an employee at work. Aisana mentioned that

their faculty conducted “satisfaction surveys” to assess job dissatisfaction, learning about aspects such as “salary, location, and food quality.” However, Baibek described a different approach, stating, “The university is explicitly and openly saying that if you don't like it, get out of here.” Participants also noted that “the management does not stick to specialists,” that is, the university management didn't try to retain employees. Lana spoke in detail about the “exit interview”, where they found out the three main reasons to found out why employees decided to quit. She also noted that “salary is always the main reason for dismissal, followed by personal moves and career changes.” They stressed that “we need to work on attracting employees, in addition to a simple salary increase.” Aigul said that managers met with employees to discuss dissatisfaction, and in some cases, “an employee is transferred to another department based on their preferences.” Kamilla noted that conflicts often arise due to “The lack of structure, the lack of communication and the lack of basic human relationships sometimes”.

Many employees of a private university claimed that they continued to work in their organisation because of comfort and stability. Baibek stated, “It's very comfortable here morally. That's one of the main reasons.” Kamilla said getting a master's degree at the place where she worked was the main reason “My master's degree, I mean the fact that I'm studying here and at the same time work”, while Diana emphasised “teamwork, the ratio of wages to working hours, and ongoing activities.” Others, such as Gaziza, described their attachment to the workplace as a “comfort zone,” saying, “I don't want to adapt to a new job again.”

Aisana spoke about a failure in staff retention efforts when a highly qualified employee requested “an increase of 100,000 tenge to pay the rent,” but was refused due to salary rules at the university, as everyone received the same salary. She noted that “private university does not practice a retention policy. They make it very easy for employees to quit.”

On the contrary, Lana described a successful case where an unsatisfied employee received “additional functionality and, consequently, a salary increase” to return to her job. Aigul also said that she initially wanted to quit, but decided to stay at work because of “realisation, perhaps, yes, there is a manager who is more suitable for this task than me. Through this realisation, just after long conversations with the boss, I came to the decision that I would stay in this job. I did not regret it”. That is, the employee decided to stay because she felt that there was a more competent person. Thanks to this, she received her promotion a year later. Aslan shared that the “double salary increase” influenced his decision to stay but stressed the need for “constant growth” due to changing trends in the industry. Aslan also expressed concern about “stagnation in one position.” Aslan noted that career growth was necessary because “students set trends for us, and we must continue to develop.”

4.4.3 Turnover Factors

Several administrative staff considered leaving their positions for various reasons. Aisana noted that she left her previous job because “I am always stressed at work because of the requirements and checks.” Aisana also shared that she initially felt she was “degrading” in this work environment due to differences in professional standards. However, she adapted over time, saying, “Private university doesn't complicate anything, and this approach works effectively.” Baibek rejected several job offers, stating: “Even with a higher salary elsewhere, the emotional burden was heavier. I decided to stay.” On the contrary, Aslan mentioned financial problems as motivation to consider leaving: “I need to increase my income, so sometimes I think about leaving.”. Aslan stated that the main reason he was considering leaving his job was the low salary. Other common factors were emotional burnout and pressure at work. Lana noted: “Working as the human resource department director involves a lot of responsibility. I often burn out and wonder why I keep doing this.” Meanwhile, Aigul

described a case where they were overworked, which made her want to quit, but she stayed after she was promoted and given more control over her work.

Participants from the two educational organisations gave two different answers, as there were different social benefits packages, such as medical care, paid leave and bonuses. Aisana was unhappy that her educational institution didn't have any social benefits from the head: "but the private university, for example, does not pay medical benefits", noting that previous employers provided the best benefits. In general, following the responses of participants from the two organisations, it could be concluded that all employees of a private organisation were dissatisfied with the social package provided by the employer, and vice versa, employees of an autonomous organisation were happy with what their employer provided them. Many participants compared the benefits of a private university with similar benefits at other institutions. Aisana noted that "Autonomous organisation paid salaries for 17 months of the year with additional bonuses for the project." On the contrary, private university staff found that "besides discounted lunches, other benefits are minimal." Baibek shared that "Nazarbayev University had VIP-level insurance, while the private university does not offer it."

As it turned out, salary didn't always play a decisive role, as some participants were willing to take a pay cut for the sake of comfort and silence. For example, Aisana admitted, "I lost in salary when I joined a private university, but I got comfort and less stress." However, Gaziza emphasised the importance of financial incentives, saying, "We live in a time when money determines everything. Salary is more important than workload." However, it is important to consider the age of the interview participants. If employees with more experience were looking for a comfortable place, then younger professionals were looking for a place where they paid a lot. In general, administrative staff left the workplace for reasons such as salary, workload, lack of career growth, and inadequate benefits.

4.4.4 Recommendations for Improvement

During the interview, the interview participants offered their options to improve the retention of administrative staff based on their desires. Kamilla emphasised the need for “structured job descriptions,” stating that employees often undertook tasks beyond their responsibilities without additional remuneration. She noted “If you are given more additional tasks, you have to be paid for these extra hours” or “you have to get a day off”. Zarina recommended “We need to conduct satisfaction surveys more often, and things like professional development and feedback should be normalised, not just when things are really bad”, thereby identifying problems in advance and solving them. Lana emphasised the importance of career growth, saying “Every leader should clearly identify growth opportunities for their team members.” At the same time, Diana proposed the introduction of “medical benefits and a system of key performance indicators”, which helped with staff retaining “this will be a very good factor in order to retain many employees”. To increase career satisfaction, the participants suggested increasing “funding for business travel and external training.” Regarding this Kanat noted that “internal career growth opportunities exist, but employees often need reminders about available development programs.” There was also a demand for professional development at work. Therefore, employees often looked for growth opportunities and asked management about additional courses or seminars. Gaziza specifically asked for “psychology courses to improve student interaction.” Others stressed that “it is necessary to restore regular professional development opportunities, as they were previously available, but were reduced due to lack of funding.”

The participants also spoke about the personnel policy of their educational institution. Aisana stressed the need for “mobility partnerships with international organisations” to “promote knowledge sharing and career growth.” Baibek noted that “in the current economic situation, wages still decide.” At the same time, Diana emphasised the importance of “it is

very important to conduct surveys very often, and so that these questions are not of an anonymous nature, but of a confidential nature. We need to react in time. Any employee in general who can be retained needs to understand the true reasons, and not how they write about marital status when they dismiss us.” Gaziza suggested “We need to improve the interaction between the human resource department and employees,” and said that employees felt separated from everything since there was no interaction with human resources or other departments. She also noted that “the human resource department needs to be more proactive in addressing staff retention issues rather than waiting for employees to quit.”

These recommendations were based on employees' dissatisfaction with their positions, and they wanted various innovations and improvements. In general, if we took all the advice of the participants, we could identify the main requirements as improvement of the social package, salary, opportunity for professional growth, comfort in the workplace and continuous development.

Chapter 5

Discussion

5.1. Introduction

This chapter discussed the findings of this research, which studied the factors that contribute to or interfere with the long-term commitment of administrative staff to their profession, as well as identifying the causes and possible solutions to the problems affecting administrative staff retention in Kazakhstani HEIs. The research questions that guided this study were:

1. How do working conditions affect administrative staff turnover in Kazakhstani HEIs?
2. What are the primary challenges administrative staff face in Kazakhstani HEIs that lead to high turnover rates?

The chapter discussed all the important findings with reference to the existing literature and theoretical frameworks related to administrative staff's experience in higher education.

5.2. Working Conditions and Job Benefits of Administrative Staff

The work experience of the administrative staff was revealed to be different. Their motivation to work was also influenced by factors such as the comfort of their workplace, support from top management, academic environment, working conditions, salary, a clear line between work and personal life, that is, work-life balance, and, as many noted, support towards them, which were important factors that support job satisfaction. These findings were consistent with the findings of Koonkongsatian (2017), who emphasised that administrative support was important in maintaining staff motivation and retention. These findings also aligned with Pitman's (2000) conclusions that HEIs should treat administrative staff as valuable internal clients, recognising their contribution to the institution's success. The similarity of the findings obtained in different studies, despite differences in the time and location of the study, could be explained by the similar nature of the factors determining job

satisfaction. All the above factors that could affect job satisfaction or dissatisfaction were fundamental human needs that went beyond specific organisational and geographical conditions. Regardless of time and location, employees tended to prioritise these aspects, which always affected staff motivation and retention. In addition, many HEIs operated in similar administrative structures, which led to similar problems they faced.

Leadership style and corporate culture impacted on administrative staff retention. Participants valued collaborative leadership and supportive supervisors, but some noted instances of micromanagement and lack of decision-making autonomy. This finding was consistent with Ng'ethe (2013), who identified leadership style as an important factor influencing job satisfaction. Employees who were working under leaders who were actively involved and supportive reported higher job satisfaction, while those facing authoritarian leadership expressed frustration. When the employees are controlled using excess control and close manipulations, it tends to build huge levels of stress that is often choking and suffocating to workers (Samakao & Mulenga, 2023). Micromanagement and lack of independence in decision-making have often been noted as demotivating factors leading to increased staff turnover. Conversely, institutions that promoted open communication benefited from improved staff retention. These findings underlined the need for universities to prioritise the development of leadership skills and value the contribution of employees.

The data from the participants showed that administrative staff prefers the system of key performance indicators since meeting these requirements involved such positive things as a bonus. However, in their educational organisation, the system of key performance indicators didn't work quite correctly, and it was not entirely clear to the participants how it worked. Since they took on additional projects for the sake of KPIs, and in the end, whether there was a reward is unknown to the participants. However, in general, the participants' responses showed that if there were rewards, they were ready for the KPI system. Even

though the KPI system was unclear, it didn't lead to staff turnover or dissatisfaction. These data were not consistent with data from Mukasheva (2022), who noted that organisational changes and key performance indicators often increase stress in the workplace due to poor communication, lack of support from management, and unrealistic expectations. According to Mukasheva's findings (2022), key performance indicators were associated with stress due to poor communication, lack of managerial support, and unrealistic expectations, whereas in this study, the uncertainty of the key performance indicators system did not lead to dissatisfaction or staff turnover. This suggested that, despite the existing uncertainty, the administrative staff is primarily motivated by potential rewards rather than burdened with unattainable expectations. In addition, the absence of direct pressure or negative consequences for failure to meet key performance indicators might explain why higher education institutions' administrative staff didn't experience the same level of stress. Thus, the difference was whether key performance indicators are considered as a source of opportunity or as an additional workload in the workplace that determined the overall employee response to the system. It should also be noted that Mukasheva's study (2022) and this study were conducted in two different fields of professions. The first study was conducted in a mining company, and the second was conducted in educational institutions. Therefore, we should consider the differences between these two institutions, even if the KPI system is the same.

One of the participants talked about the hiring process. To ensure that staff turnover is not high, during the interview, the HEI administration asked a potential employee their reason for joining their educational institution, their previous work experience and, importantly, what they expected from the job, such as salary. And finally, after hiring, they tried to support the employee. This practice helped an educational organisation hire an employee immediately for a long time. These data were consistent with the statements of

King et al. (2018), who provided a qualitative study of career change in academia through thematic analysis. In this study, the author wrote about four main points that need to be understood and considered to improve the employee retention process. These were the reasons for the transition, initial experience, expectation management, and institutional support. Similar guidelines were used by the administration of a private university.

Three participants noted that one of the reasons why they left their previous place of work was the search for a quiet life and a quiet job where comfort and a calm work environment prevail. That is, the employee left the institution where there was overwork and pressure in search of a calm environment. Said et al. (2018) studied employee turnover intentions and found that workload and poor leadership are among the main reasons employees leave their jobs. Their study highlighted those employees who experienced extreme workloads at work and lacked opportunities for career growth often perceived their work as unacceptable, which led to staff turnover. This was consistent with the responses of participants who left their previous jobs due to overwork and stress in search of a more relaxed work environment. Young professionals were more focused on career advancement. The participants talked about this in an interview. That is, the data showed that if there was an opportunity for growth, then employees were ready to stay and work further. But if they stopped feeling that they were developing at their place of work, they preferred to change their place of work. For instance, one of the participants said that she could have left if she hadn't been promoted. This participant placed career advancement higher than salary or other factors. These findings tied well with previous studies wherein Tnay et al. (2013) emphasised that many employees choose to stay at work for career opportunities and potential promotions, and when these expectations are met, job satisfaction increases.

5.3 Job Satisfaction Factors

Eight out of ten interviewees, when choosing a job, noted the importance of having the opportunity for career growth, a good salary without overwork, and the opportunity to participate in projects or vocational training. They noted these aspects as very important to them. The findings showed that salaries, job benefits and working conditions significantly affect administrative staff. For instance, many participants noted that they wanted to be left because of low salaries and lack of career promotion, which was reflected with the hygienic factor of Herzberg. The theory stated that solving hygiene problems prevented job dissatisfaction but didn't lead to satisfaction. The assumption about the hygiene factor was correct. Even though, in some cases, a university offered competitive salaries, the lack of opportunities for professional development and career growth still left employees dissatisfied. This supported Herzberg's argument that hygiene factors alone were not enough for long-term motivation. Similar patterns were found in previous research by Bala and Jayavardhini (2018), who identified factors influencing employee retention in HEIs. These factors that significantly affected employee retention were career growth potential, employee empowerment, employee training, employee compensation, employee commitment, performance evaluation, work-life balance, and job security. Among them, the potential for career growth turned out to be the most influential factor. A similar conclusion was reached by Zamri et al. (2022), who identified what influenced the retention of administrative staff in universities. They found that job satisfaction, which was influenced by remuneration and professional development opportunities, played an important role in retention. The participants noted that a good salary was an important argument to stay at work and continue working. However, job satisfaction was more influenced by other factors. As previously noted, this was a good climate in the team, an opportunity for growth, and a good salary. Many also wanted professional recognition. However, the lack of recognition didn't have

much effect on job satisfaction. Participants who continued to work often cited career promotion, the opportunity to complete internships and improve their skills, and a good workplace atmosphere as reasons to stay. These elements were consistent with Herzberg's motivators, as internal job satisfaction had a higher impact on employee retention than external remuneration. Employees who had career opportunities tended to report greater engagement and commitment to their institution. This confirmed Herzberg's assumption that job satisfaction was driven by motivating factors, not just hygienic ones. Five out of ten respondents noted a lack of professional recognition, but they continued to work because they were satisfied with other aspects of the job. Contrary to the conclusions of Heckert and Farabee (2006), I have not found that professional recognition influences the decision to stay at work. But they also noted that the decision to stay at work was influenced by such a factor as salary. In Herzberg's theory, it was argued that salary was only a hygienic factor, that is, salary could prevent dissatisfaction but wouldn't lead to satisfaction. However, the findings of this study didn't match this theory. The findings of the study showed that for some employees, salary was both a motivating and hygienic factor. For instance, some participants reported that the salary increase made them feel appreciated and encouraged them to stay rather than just prevent dissatisfaction. That suggested that under certain conditions, financial stimulus might play a direct role in motivation, contrary to Herzberg's predictions.

During the interview, the options offered by the staff of HEIs included such points as a clear definition of career opportunities, additional days off after overworking, improved financial conditions, and opportunities for professional growth through courses or internships. Wagner (2006) argued that employee engagement was an important indicator of job satisfaction and their intention to remain in the organisation. The data collected was also consistent with Wagner's statements regarding job satisfaction improvement proposals, where

the author suggested that training and professional development programs could improve staff skills, motivation, and retention.

5.4 Job Dissatisfaction Factors

The data collected showed that administrative staff in their educational organisation wanted career advancement, but this applied to young professionals in most cases. Employees with many years of work experience preferred well-being, good corporate culture, comfort, and good wages. It was noteworthy that among the interviewees, some complained about a small salary, but they continued to work in that position. But most have noticed that if they didn't have a promotion, they would prefer to change jobs. These data were half consistent with the statements of Zamri et al. (2022) that career stagnation, low salaries and lack of career growth were among the main factors influencing resigning from work. Collected data has shown that in most cases, staff turnover was affected by a lack of career growth, but having a low salary could lead to dissatisfaction and still wasn't enough to justify quitting a job. The study showed that administrative staff's job satisfaction was influenced by salary, workload, recognition, and workplace relationships. While some participants appreciated the flexibility of their roles, others emphasised the need for clear career paths. Herzberg's two-factor theory (Herzberg, 1966) suggested that the lack of motivators such as career growth and recognition could lead to dissatisfaction. The findings obtained confirm that structured career opportunities were necessary to increase job satisfaction and reduce staff turnover. The participants also talked about the various benefits provided by the employer or their absence. The interviewees of a private university where there were no benefits noted that they wanted benefits such as bonuses, medical insurance and medical benefits. However, as the employees' response showed, the presence of these benefits could lead to greater job satisfaction, but their absence didn't lead to dissatisfaction. Representatives of the autonomous university complained more about the low salary, lack of communication with

the human resource department and difficulties with promotion. Ohunakin (2015), in a study about the intentional turnover of administrative staff, identified the three main reasons for voluntary turnover from work. Low remuneration and additional benefits as an object of dissatisfaction scored over 97% out of 100%. Also, inconstant promotion took 87% of the results shown in this article, which was consistent with the data that was obtained during the interview. The main reasons for the decrease in job satisfaction were that the study participants noted such factors as low pay, lack of job promotion, and many participants from a private university pointed out that the lack of benefits at work also affects satisfaction. Thus, the collected data was consistent with the data of Ohunakin (2015), who found out the reasons for job dissatisfaction.

5.5 Summary

This chapter considered the factors influencing the retention of administrative staff in Kazakhstani HEIs. The results of the data showed that working conditions, wages and career opportunities significantly affect staff retention. The data also showed that even if there were some uncertainties at work, which were expected to lead to dissatisfaction, such as the case with the key performance indicator, it did not lead to dissatisfaction. Career opportunities were the most significant indicators for young specialists, while for experienced and adult employees, comfortable work and stress-free work were one of the main factors. The study partially agrees with Herzberg's two-factor theory, although salary acted as a hygienic and motivational factor.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

This chapter presented the concluding observations of this study on the retention of administrative staff in Kazakhstani HEIs. After examining the factors influencing staff retention through qualitative interviews and thematic analysis, this chapter summarised the findings and their implications for HEIs. This chapter also provided recommendations for improving retention strategies and reflected the limitations of the study and the personal reflections gained during the research process.

6.2 Summary of Conclusions

This study showed that the retention of administrative staff in Kazakhstani HEIs was influenced by many factors, such as salary, workload, career opportunities, corporate culture, management, team relationships, social benefits, professional development and stability at work. Although the working conditions were generally satisfactory, the main reasons for dissatisfaction were the lack of career growth and insufficient wages. The autonomous university provided better social benefits, while the private institution offered more flexible working conditions and a comfortable working environment. However, both universities had problems providing clear career paths for their staff. The study also showed that young professionals preferred career growth, while experienced employees valued stability and comfort, which indicated the need to develop retention strategies according to demographic specifics. To improve staff retention, the study recommended implementing individual career development plans, improving the human resource department's interaction with staff, establishing a transparent system of key performance indicators, and offering social packages at a private university.

6.3 Organisational practice

The decision to stay at work or quit was a personal decision of the employee, which is influenced by external factors. Despite the common factors, each individual might have separate or personal reasons to stay at work or quit. Some wanted high salaries, and some were looking for career opportunities. Interestingly, the senior staff valued stability and comfort, while the younger professionals prioritised professional growth and higher wages. These big differences suggested that retention strategies should not only be adapted to institutions but also consider employees' age differences. Leadership style was also important in staff retention. For instance, at a private university where many participants praised the corporate culture and good relations with supervisors, higher morale and loyalty were observed, while the authoritarian style mentioned in the autonomous organisation led to dissatisfaction.

Although many participants in an autonomous organisation were happy with the fact that they have various types of bonuses (such as insurance, bonuses, and KPI system), even so, these advantages were not enough to make employees want to continue working. Lack of career opportunities contributed to dissatisfaction. The participants also noted the need for more active involvement of the human resource department. In an autonomous organisation, the human resource department was more passive, and when problems were raised, they only dealt with the consequences of inaction. Strengthening interaction with staff throughout an employee's life cycle during recruitment, performance evaluation, development planning, and termination could build trust and prevent premature dismissals. In addition, the differences between autonomous and private universities have highlighted the importance of consistent institutional policies. For instance, private universities were often perceived as more flexible but lacked structured support systems, while autonomous universities offered benefits but sometimes faced excessive bureaucracy.

6.4 Recommendations

After conducting all the interviews and considering the thoughts of the participants, I could assume some improvements for HEIs. The wish of many employees has shown that personalised career paths must first be developed. In other words, institutions should develop individual professional development plans for employees. The university should include annual performance reviews and opportunities for internal promotion. Employees who saw a future in their organisation were more likely to continue working. Next, the interaction between the human resource department and other departments should be improved. Solving a problem at the beginning stage could prevent an employee from leaving. The human resource department should be involved not only in hiring and dismissals. Regular checkups, satisfaction surveys, and training needs assessments would help reduce dissatisfaction. Next, making the KPI system clear, and for a private university, it should be implemented. The key performance indicators system also served as an incentive for employees to achieve any goals, and they receive a reward as a result. Organisations should clearly define key performance indicators and link them to achievable goals and related rewards. Transparency in performance evaluation would reduce uncertainty, as well as increase employee engagement. The next point applied more to a private university. A private university should implement a social package and various types of bonuses to encourage employees. Such a gesture not only would increase loyalty but also show the staff the institution's commitment to ensure the well-being of staff.

6.5 Limitations of the Study

This study was limited to two universities and ten participants. Even if this number of participants provided a lot of information, a more extensive study of this issue could show the general attitude of the administrative staff. Future research may use a mixed-method approach that includes surveys at multiple universities for quantitative assessment.

It would also be useful to study the long-term effects of implementing retention strategies, possibly through longitudinal research. Because the proposed recommendations in this study have not been tested in practice and have not been changed or improved.

6.6 Personal Reflections

Writing this master's thesis took quite a long time and required a balance between work, lessons and personal life. As an administrative staff myself, I have long been interested in the topic of why many employees decide to leave their positions, and this study provided an opportunity to understand the thoughts and experiences of university staff. Administrative staff is the basis of HEIs. They lead activities, provide support to students and faculty, and ensure institutional continuity. Despite this, the problem of their retention in Kazakhstani HEIs remains insufficiently studied. This study provides information about the problems and expectations of administrative staff. I admit that I still lack many skills, and writing a thesis is just the beginning of the path where I rather made a lot of mistakes. However, I believe this study is a start and will help me in my future work.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Completed AI Declaration Form



Thesis Title:

Declaration of the Use of Generative AI

I hereby declare that I have read and understood NUGSE's policy concerning appropriate use of AI and composed this work independently (please check one):

with the use of artificial intelligence tools.

(If you have used AI tools as defined in the GSE policy document, please complete the rest of this form.)

During the preparation of this thesis/examination, I used Grammarly, Quillbot and ChatGPT for proofreading, for the text to be more academic and I used ChatGPT to find materials related to my topic of the article.

I also declare that I

am aware of the capabilities and limitations of AI tool(s),

have verified that the content generated by AI systems and adopted by me is factually correct,

am aware that as the author of this thesis I bear full responsibility for the statements and assertions made in it,

have submitted complete and accurate information about my use of AI tools in this work,
and

acknowledge that there may be disciplinary consequences if I have not followed NUGSE's guidelines regarding appropriate AI use.

Name: Temirlan T.

Signature:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Temirlan T.', written in a cursive style.

Date: 07.09.2024

Appendix B: Interview Protocol

Title of the Research: Retention of Administrative Staff in Higher Education Institutions in Kazakhstan

Date of the interview:

Start time of the interview:

End time of the interview:

Place of the interview:

Participant: **Interviewer:**

Introduction to a participant:

Good afternoon! You are invited to take part in a study titled “*Retention of Administrative Staff in Higher Education Institutions*”.

The study is being conducted by Temirlan Tursynbayev, a graduate student at Nazarbayev University, majoring in MSc Educational Leadership. The interview will last approximately 30-45 minutes. The interview will include questions about your experience and perceptions regarding job satisfaction, working conditions, professional recognition, and other factors influencing your decision to stay or leave your position. Only administrative staff of HEIs take part in the interview. If you have any questions, please contact me via email: temirlan.tursynbayev@nu.edu.kz or call +7707 887 6465.

1. Can you describe your experience working as an administrative staff member at this university?

How long have you been working in your current position?

What made you choose this work in higher education administration?

2. How would you describe the working conditions at your university?

Are the physical work conditions (e.g., workspace, equipment) suitable for your role?

How do you find the work-life balance in your position? Is it manageable?

How does the workload affect your performance and satisfaction?

3. What factors do you think contribute most to job satisfaction in your role?

How important is salary to your job satisfaction?

What role do professional recognition and career development opportunities play in your job satisfaction?

4. What motivates you to stay in your current position?

Is there any recognition or reward system in place that keeps you motivated?

Do you feel empowered and responsible for your work?

5. What role do benefits such as health care, paid leave, or professional development play in your decision to stay in your position?

Do you feel that the benefits package offered by the institution meets your needs?

How do these benefits compare to what is offered at other institutions?

6. How do you think the university can better support administrative staff in terms of career growth and job satisfaction?

What opportunities for professional development or training would be helpful to you?

Do you feel that your work contributes to the university's goals, and does that sense of purpose keep you satisfied?

7. Have you ever considered leaving your position? If yes, what factors made you think about that decision?

How significant were issues like salary, career growth, or working conditions in your consideration?

What factors made you stay despite any challenges?

8. How do you rate the leadership and management style at this educational institution?

How does management support or hinder your work?

Do you feel that management solves your problems or provides support when needed?

How much autonomy do you have in making decisions related to your work?

9. What are the main challenges you face as an administrative staff member?

Can you describe any specific challenges related to working conditions (e.g., workload, physical environment)?

How do relationships with supervisors and colleagues affect your experience?

10. How does the university resolve conflicts or problems related to job dissatisfaction?

Have you ever had conflicts or concerns addressed by management? If yes, how?

Do you think these issues contribute to why some staff choose to leave?

11. What changes or improvements in your opinion help reduce staff turnover in administrative roles?

How could the institution improve its HR policies to support administrative staff better?

What changes would you recommend to improve the working conditions or support systems?

12. How do you perceive the corporate culture and organizational support in your institution?

How does the leadership style impact your job satisfaction?

Do you feel supported in your role? Why or why not?

13. In your opinion, why do administrative staff members decide to leave their positions at this institution?

What role do salary, workload, or professional development opportunities play in staff turnover?

Are there personal reasons (e.g., family, relocation) that you think contribute to turnover?

Can you share examples where staff retention efforts were successful or unsuccessful?

14. Do you have something to add? If yes, please feel free to share.