

THE INFLUENCE OF JOB SATISFACTION AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES ON GRADUATE EMPLOYEE RETENTION IN ORGANIZATIONS IN MALAYSIA

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Abstract: *Malaysia's labor market is facing increasingly fierce competition, and the outflow of young talents has become a core pain point in human resource management for local enterprises. There remains a clear gap in local empirical research focused on the retention willingness of graduate employees. Therefore, this study centers on the working graduate population in Malaysia, to examine the influence of job satisfaction and career development opportunities on graduate retention intentions. This study adopts a quantitative method, collects sample data via structured online questionnaires, and conducts analysis using descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and multiple regression models. The results show that both variables have a positive impact on retention willingness, with career development opportunities exhibiting stronger predictive power. This dimension covers training support, mentorship programs, continuous learning resources, and transparent promotion paths, while job satisfaction includes supportive work environments, value recognition, meaningful work, and positive workplace relationships. The research not only fills the literature gap in the local field of talent retention, but also provides practical guidance for enterprises to reduce early-stage turnover rates and enhance employees' long-term organizational commitment.*

Keywords: *Graduate Retention; Job Satisfaction; Career Development Opportunities; Organizations; Early-Career Employees*

Introduction

In the highly competitive labour market with continuously accelerating iteration speeds, retaining recent college graduates has become a core human resources challenge facing most companies. Recent graduates generally have limited practical experience, but hold high expectations for work meaning, recognition of their value, and room for career growth. If these expectations go unmet, they are very likely to see declining loyalty and develop intentions to resign. External macro trends including technological iteration, the widespread adoption of automation, and the progress of globalization have further increased the difficulty companies face in retaining this group. A review of peer-reviewed research published by Hsiao and Lin (2018), Serhan et al. (2016), Reyneke (2019), Rodriguez and Walters (2017), Jackson (2009), and Eldeen et al. (2018) leads to the conclusion that recent graduates' retention at an organization is shaped by the combined effect of three factors: personal expectations, workplace experience, and perceived career prospects.

The core organizational factors that influence retention intention can be split into three categories. First, job satisfaction, which is affected by multiple elements including salary level, workload balance, and the level of support from direct supervisors. Second, effective internal communication: to adapt to their roles, new hires need clear work instructions, timely feedback, and targeted guidance. Third, clear career development opportunities: systematic training, mentorship programs, and explicit promotion paths all strengthen new employees' motivation to stay with the organization. The current gap between the alignment of higher education and actual industry needs has further exacerbated this challenge. Only by aligning college training outcomes with employers' practical demands, while building a supportive work environment, improving internal communication mechanisms, and providing full-cycle career development resources, can this industry-wide challenge be alleviated.

Organizations have a major part to play in keeping hold of their top-quality graduates and retaining them. There is a lack of research into graduate employee retention literature. Graduate employees are a distinct group within the workforce; therefore, little attention has been paid to graduates as a separate workforce group. Additionally, the combined impact of key workplace factors on graduate employees' intentions to stay with an organization are not yet fully understood. Studies have been conducted in Malaysia concerning retention levels among younger and graduate employees; however, there is still fragmented data from different industries, age groups, and predictor variables. For example, studies by Sherlin (2020), Cheong (2024), and Mohd Razalee and Shafizi (2025) looked primarily at Generation Z employees in particular industries and considered many different factors that could influence whether an individual would remain employed with an organization or leave. These studies offer valuable insight; however, they are limited due to their sector specific samples and different sets of predictor variables, making it difficult to draw general conclusions about the combined effect of job satisfaction and career development opportunities on graduate employee retention.

Therefore, this study is directed towards evaluating the impact of job satisfaction and career advancement opportunities upon graduate employees' intent to remain with their current employer in Malaysia. This study was undertaken to achieve the following three goals; first, to determine which factors have a significant effect on the retention of graduates, second, to evaluate the relationship between job satisfaction and graduate employee retention, and third, to evaluate the effect of career advancement opportunities on graduate employee retention. It is anticipated that these results will add value to the body of knowledge related to retaining graduate employees as well as provide actionable advice for companies in order to develop better talent retention programs.

Graduate Retention

In the field of employee retention, studies by Allen et al. (2010) and Hom et al. (2017) successively defined the concept as employees' state and subjective willingness to stay in their current employing organization. The academic community widely recognizes the core value of this variable for the stability of an organization's human capital and its operational efficiency, making it one of the core research topics in the field of organizational talent management. However, employee retention is by no means a uniform issue that can be generalized; the retention logic of different labour force groups has fundamental differences. The core variable focused on in this study is graduate retention, which is explicitly defined as the subjective willingness of newly graduated employees who have just left campus to stay in their current organization and not proactively seek external job opportunities.

This study chooses retention willingness rather than actual on-the-job records as the measurement indicator, because actual length of employment may be interfered with by non-subjective factors such as labour contract constraints and non-compete restrictions, while retention willingness can more accurately reflect an individual's true retention tendency. The core reason why graduate retention requires separate research is that this group is in the critical transition period from campus to the workplace, and needs to complete four core tasks: adapting to organizational expectations, converting academic knowledge into workplace practice, developing professional relationships, and establishing career directions. Their retention decisions depend on the degree of match between their early workplace experiences and six expectations: meaningful work, organizational recognition, workplace support, learning opportunities, salary, and promotion space.

This study adopts the classic expectation fulfilment theory proposed by Porter & Steers (1973) to explain this matching logic, and this theory has been widely used to analyse the mechanism behind individuals' retention decisions. Previous retention studies generally have limitations: most categorize all employees as a homogeneous general workforce, ignoring the core differences between new graduates and senior employees. The latest study by Salem (2025) supplements the unique retention-influencing dimensions of the young employee group, which confirms the necessity of segmented research.

Based on the above review, this study puts forward a core judgment: graduate retention is jointly influenced by both individual and organizational factors. In the research field concerning college graduate retention, the academic community has sorted out 8 general workplace predictor variables that may influence graduates' retention willingness and actual retention behaviour, spanning multiple dimensions including salary level, commuting conditions, and team atmosphere. However, many previous studies have fallen into the mistake of including an excessive number of variables for testing at the same time, which often dilutes the explanatory power of core variables and weakens the focus of the research. Aligned with its own research objectives, this study selects job satisfaction and career development opportunities as core predictor variables from the aforementioned pool of general variables to carry out focused testing.

Job Satisfaction

The academic connotation of the first core independent variable, job satisfaction, first needs to be clarified: the general definition of this variable refers to employees' level of positive perception of their work as a whole and its various sub-dimensions. Its classic definition originates from the affective evaluation framework of individuals' work roles proposed by

Locke (1976), and its influencing factors can be broken down into multiple dimensions including job fit, leadership support, and sustainable human resource management practices. For the specific group of new graduate employees, the formation logic of their job satisfaction differs from that of long-tenured veteran employees. Their evaluation dimensions lean more toward job matching and growth space, and their expected sources of job satisfaction are mainly concentrated on various types of resource support in the early stage of employment.

To verify the core association between job satisfaction and retention, this study builds on the meta-analysis findings published by Tett and Meyer (1993) to consolidate the academic consensus on this link. It also cites the recent cutting-edge research by Sypniewska et al. (2023) to further align with the field's latest developments, confirm the strong correlation between job satisfaction and turnover and retention behaviours, and lay a solid academic foundation for the variable selection logic of this study's subsequent analysis.

In addition to being a possible indicator of how likely an employee is to remain working for the organization that currently employs him/her, job satisfaction does not guarantee that the employee will stay with that same employer. Job satisfaction has been shown to reduce an employee's desire to seek out other employment options (employee turnover). There are many other variables that may lead an employee to decide to seek out another position outside of the organization. Examples of these variables include: opportunities to obtain higher wages in another location; opportunities to pursue more desirable external career options; personal circumstances; and/or opportunities to advance professionally. Therefore, although job satisfaction is a very important variable that can be utilized to determine if an employee intends to remain employed with his/her present employer, it is only one variable among many.

This study selects job satisfaction and career development opportunities as its core independent variables. First, it defines the first core variable, job satisfaction: it is a key internal assessment dimension that shapes graduates' intention to stay with their current employer, but it cannot alone guarantee that employees will remain in their posts indefinitely. Graduates' retention decisions are also influenced by three categories of external factors: external employment opportunities, personal circumstances, and labour market conditions. The core reason this study incorporates job satisfaction into the analysis is that it can accurately capture graduates' subjective assessments of their current employment experiences. Considering the group characteristics of graduates who are new to the workplace, when they receive fair treatment, resource support, recognition of their value, and perceive a good fit between themselves and their posts, they are more likely to view their current employing organization as a platform for long-term career development. Based on this, this study proposes the following hypothesis: the higher graduates' satisfaction with the work itself, working conditions, workplace relationships, and organizational treatment, the stronger their intention to stay with the organization.

Career Development Opportunities

Career development opportunities, is defined in this study as organizational practices and experiences that help employees acquire skills, achieve career goals, take on more responsibilities, and advance in their careers. Its specific forms fall into nine categories: formal training, mentorship programs, coaching, job rotation, professional certification, performance feedback, challenging tasks, succession planning, and transparent promotion pathways.

As a group at the starting stage of their careers, graduates' retention decisions are not only affected by current rewards, but also focus more on whether an organization can provide a

credible growth path. They evaluate their employers from three dimensions: accessible knowledge and experience, developable competencies, and the possibility of promotion. This variable serves the dual functions of supporting career development and boosting employee retention. Past empirical studies also provide support for the explanatory power of this variable.

Weng et al. (2010) conceptualized organizational career growth into four dimensions: progress toward career goals, professional competence development, promotion speed, and salary growth. The study found that these dimensions are positively correlated with organizational commitment, which corroborates that when employees believe staying with an organization can support their own career goals, they are more likely to develop psychological attachment to the organization.

Weng & McElroy (2012) found that progress toward career goals, professional development, and organizational rewards are negatively correlated with turnover intention, which further supports the core argument that organizations that provide opportunities aligned with employees' expectations for career growth can improve employee retention rates. When sorting out the core factors influencing the retention intention of Generation Z graduates and building the theoretical foundation for this study to derive its research hypotheses, we first cite the cutting-edge work of Jamalulel and Chang (2025), which finds that for Generation Z employees, career development and job satisfaction are the core elements shaping their turnover decisions.

Nevertheless, the effect of career development opportunities on retention may not always be straightforward. Development initiatives such as training, professional certification, mentoring, and competency development can enhance employees' skills and career prospects within the organisation, but they may also increase employees' external employability and attractiveness to other employers. Therefore, career development opportunities may strengthen retention when employees perceive clear internal advancement pathways, fair access to development opportunities, and alignment between development support and their long-term career goals. In the absence of these conditions, the relationship with retention intention may be weaker or less consistent.

This study introduces Blau's social exchange theory, first proposed in 1964, as its core analytical foundation. When an organization invests resources such as training, mentorship, and promotion opportunities for its graduate hires, these graduates will view these inputs as the organization's recognition of their value, and in turn reciprocate the organization with stronger organizational commitment, loyalty, and willingness to stay in their roles. However, the ability of career development opportunities to boost retention is not unconditional. These opportunities only produce a positive effect when they meet five criteria: being accessible, aligned with individuals' personal career goals, fairly distributed, responsive to employees' needs, and connected to real promotion pathways. For this reason, this study lists career development opportunities as its second core independent variable.

Job Satisfaction and Graduate Retention

Job satisfaction refers to employees' overall assessment of their current workplace experiences, while retention intention refers to employees' willingness to continue their existing employment relationship; the two have a stable logical connection. The expectation fulfilment theory proposed by Porter and Steers in 1973 can explain this association. This theory is well-suited for the graduate population, who form their expectations solely based on on-campus

learning, internships, recruitment information, and limited professional experience. When actual working conditions match the expectations, graduates held before joining their jobs, their job satisfaction and positive evaluations of the organization will both improve.

Graduates who are satisfied with their jobs develop stronger emotional connections with their organizations, as they perceive their job responsibilities, workplace support, work-related recognition, and working conditions to be a good fit. Dissatisfied graduates, by contrast, form intentions to leave their positions. Classic turnover studies by Tett & Meyer (1993) and Hom et al. (2017) point out that job satisfaction is a core antecedent variable of employee retention.

Career Development Opportunities and Graduate Retention

The core role of career development opportunities is to clearly show employees the personal growth path they can achieve if they stay with their current employer, and this factor carries special importance for the group of recent graduates, who are in the process of building professional competencies and establishing their career direction.

Relevant actionable support measures that enterprises can implement include structured training, mentorship programs, constructive feedback, assignment of high-value work tasks, and transparent promotion systems, all of which help graduates develop a long-term career blueprint with their current employer. Blau's (1964) social exchange theory explains this mechanism: development resources invested by an organization count as preferential contributions, and employees will reciprocate by staying in their roles and raising their organizational commitment. After graduates perceive these investments, they develop a sense of value and are willing to contribute to the organization long-term.

Expectation fulfilment theory further supplements this logic: if graduates' learning and development expectations for their first job are met internally, their demand to seek external job opportunities will decrease; by contrast, the attractiveness of external employers will rise. Past empirical research also supports this correlation: Weng et al. (2010) and Weng & McElroy (2012) confirmed that organizational career growth is positively correlated with employee commitment and negatively correlated with turnover intention, and Jamalulel & Chang (2025) also verified the significant impact of career development on the turnover decisions of young employee groups.

Overall, prior studies generally support positive relationships between job satisfaction, career development opportunities, and employee retention. However, these relationships may vary according to individual expectations, external labour-market opportunities, perceived fairness, and the availability of credible internal career pathways. These mixed and context-dependent possibilities justify further empirical examination of both predictors within the Malaysian graduate employment context.

Research Framework

This paper sets graduate student retention rate as its core dependent variable. Independent variables are divided into two categories: the first is present-oriented job satisfaction, assessed across six dimensions: job responsibilities, working conditions, remuneration, interpersonal relationships, supervision, and overall employment experience; the second is future-oriented career development opportunities, whose assessment dimensions include the organization's level of support for learning, promotion, and long-term career goals.

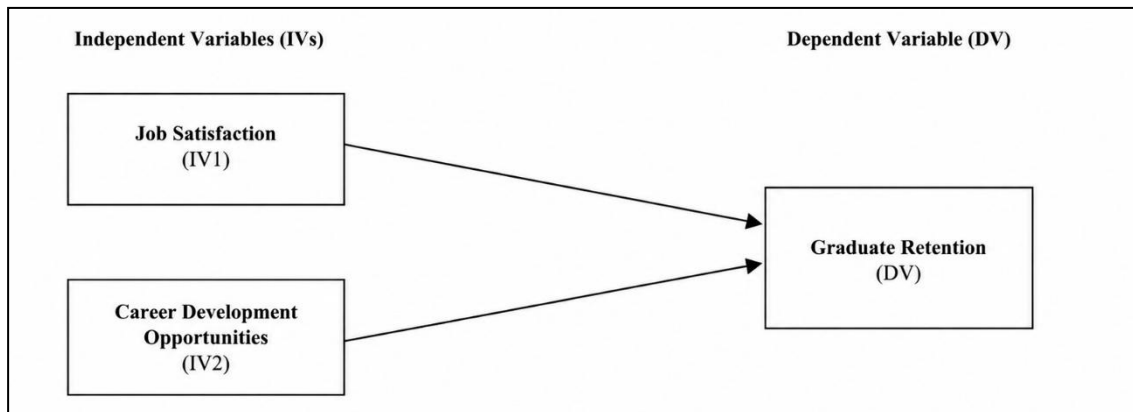


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework Model

This study's framework is supported by social exchange theory and expectation fulfilment theory. The former explains that organizational investment drives employees to reciprocate by remaining in their positions, while the latter clarifies that the fulfilment of workplace and career expectations shapes employees' retention decisions.

Research Methodology

The research method used for this study was a quantitative cross-sectional survey which investigated how both employee job satisfaction and available career development options affected the employee retention intentions of graduate employees in Malaysia. Graduate employees who were employed at various organizations throughout Malaysia made up the study's population. Participants in the study fell into one of four categories based on their highest level of education; Bachelor's degree, Master's degree, PhD/other advanced degrees, and professional certifications.

This study employed a non-probability convenience sampling method. An online questionnaire was distributed to participants via WhatsApp, Telegram, and Instagram. Participation in this research was completely voluntary. It is believed that the majority of those who responded to this survey are currently employed in Malaysia and have completed their undergraduate degree. Since the survey did not ask about respondents' employers' names, industries, occupational category or exact location, the results of this survey can not be considered representative of any single industry or region within Malaysia.

The questionnaire had four sections that asked about; demographics, job satisfaction, career development opportunities and retention. To measure job satisfaction there were 9 questions. To measure career development opportunities there were 5 questions. To measure retention there were 4 questions. Some examples of questions asked in the questionnaire include: "How satisfied are you with your current job?", "How satisfied are you with the frequency of training opportunities provided by your organization?", and "How likely are you to continue working for your current organization for the next year?". The questionnaire was completed in English; therefore, no translation or back translation was necessary.

A prior test was administered with 30 individuals who would not be included in the larger group (survey) in order to determine how clear the questions were, how well they could be understood, and how pertinent they would be to the topic. Based on feedback received through the prior test, modifications were made to the phrasing and organization of the survey tool prior to the

larger collection of data. A total of 384 valid responses were collected.

Analysis and Findings

Demographic Profile of Respondents

This study adopts a standardized baseline description framework for quantitative social science samples to report respondents' demographic characteristics. It breaks down the sample distribution across five core dimensions in sequence to clearly demonstrate the sample's representativeness. A total of 384 valid respondent samples were collected for this study. On the gender dimension, the share of male and female samples is nearly balanced. There are 194 male respondents, accounting for 50.5% of the total sample, and 190 female respondents, accounting for 49.5%, achieving sufficient coverage of both gender groups. On the age dimension, the 26–29 age group makes up the largest share, with 139 respondents accounting for 36.2% of the total.

The core of the overall sample consists of young employees aged 22 to 29. On the ethnicity dimension, the sample covers the three main local ethnic groups: 169 ethnic Malay respondents (44% of the total), 117 ethnic Chinese respondents (30.5%), and 98 ethnic Indian respondents (25.5%). All three major groups hold a sufficient share of the sample, with no single ethnic group dominating the sample composition. In terms of educational attainment, nearly 60% of respondents hold a bachelor's degree, and more than 95% of all respondents have an educational level of bachelor's degree or above, meaning the overall sample has a relatively high educational level.

The length of employment of respondents spans the full cycle from less than six months since joining the organization to more than five years in the role, covering three groups: newly hired staff, mid-level experienced employees, and long-tenured senior workers. This broad distribution meets the sample representativeness requirements to support the subsequent analysis of this study.

Descriptive Analysis of the Study Variables

Table 1: Descriptive Analysis of the Study Variables

Variables	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Graduate Retention	384	3.71	0.53
Job Satisfaction	384	3.75	0.41
Career Development Opportunity	384	3.75	0.38

This study relies on valid survey data collected from 384 respondents. Table 1 presents the descriptive statistical results of three core observed variables: graduates' retention intention, job satisfaction, and career development opportunities, all of which were collected and measured using a 5-point Likert scale. The statistical results show that the overall mean values of the three indicators fall within the range of 3.71 to 3.75. Specifically, both job satisfaction and career development opportunities have a mean value of 3.75, while only the mean for graduates' retention is slightly lower at 3.71.

Their standard deviations range from 0.38 to 0.53: career development opportunities have the lowest standard deviation of 0.38, job satisfaction has a standard deviation of 0.41, and

graduates' retention has the highest standard deviation, which reaches 0.53. It should be noted that the current descriptive statistics, which only cover the full sample, have clear limitations, as they have not yet conducted subgroup differentiation for groups with different educational backgrounds. Follow-up research will add analysis of variance and independent sample tests to verify significant differences in each indicator across groups with different educational qualifications. Overall, the relatively low mean value and high dispersion of the graduates' retention indicator collectively reflect the prevalent potential retention uncertainty among the surveyed group.

Regression Analysis

Table 2: Regression Analysis

Variables	β	T	P
Job Satisfaction	.29	4.15	<.001
Career Development Opportunities	.49	6.49	<.001

This study uses a multiple linear regression model to conduct a quantitative analysis of the core factors affecting the retention rate of organizations newly hired recent graduates (refer to Table 2). The core empirical results show that both job satisfaction and career development opportunities have a significant positive predictive effect on graduates' retention rate. Job satisfaction, which covers five dimensions—job-content matching degree, perceived organizational support, recognition of work value, hard and soft working conditions, and overall employment experience, reaches an extremely high level of statistical significance, with its statistical indicators measuring $\beta=.29$, $t=4.15$, $p<0.001$. Meanwhile, career development opportunities, which include pre-service and on-the-job training, resources for professional ability development, one-on-one mentorship, transparent internal promotion channels, and clear long-term career tracks, also demonstrates strong statistical reliability, with its statistical indicators measuring $\beta=.49$, $t=6.49$, $p<0.001$. In terms of influence intensity, the boosting effect of career development opportunities on the retention rate is significantly stronger than that of job satisfaction. It is critical to clarify that the model used in this study has eliminated the influence of all confounding variables; the lower influence intensity of job satisfaction does not mean this factor is unimportant, and the explanatory power of both types of variables has passed rigorous verification.

Based on these findings, this study puts forward retention management recommendations for organizations: organizations should not only focus on short-term improvements to graduates' immediate job satisfaction, but also invest equal or even greater resources to build a full-cycle, accessible, open and transparent career development opportunity system, so as to effectively elevate graduates' long-term willingness to stay with the company. The findings suggest that organizations should adopt an integrated approach by implementing both career development initiatives and workplace support measures.

Overall Results

A total of 400 questionnaires were distributed for this study, and 384 valid questionnaires were recovered, representing a valid recovery rate of 96.0%. A reliability test of the core measurement tools found that the Cronbach's α coefficients of the three core variables—willingness to stay, job satisfaction, and career development opportunities—all exceeded 0.6, so the internal consistency of the measurement scales met the required standard. This study sequentially lists the distribution proportions of the surveyed sample across genders, age

groups, and education levels, presents the descriptive statistical results of the core variables, completes correlation analysis between variables, and then conducts regression analysis. The regression results show that for job satisfaction, $\beta=.29$, $t=4.15$, $p<.001$; for career development opportunities, $\beta=.49$, $t=6.49$, $p<.001$. The latter variable has a stronger predictive effect, and the study ultimately confirms that both variables have a significant positive impact on graduates' willingness to stay at their original work organization.

Conclusion

This study successfully achieved its preset research objectives, identifying the core factors that influence the retention rate of graduate employees at the organization. Through testing, both job satisfaction and career development opportunities were found to have a positive effect on retention, with the latter exerting a stronger impact. This study ultimately derived the core conclusion that graduates' retention decisions are jointly shaped by their current employment experiences and perceptions of future career growth.

For organizations seeking to retain college graduates, two categories of implementable supporting measures can be adopted: the first set of six elements, which includes building a supportive work environment, can enhance graduates' job satisfaction and strengthen their sense of organizational belonging; meanwhile, rolling out four development elements including structured training can help graduates improve their professional capabilities and clarify their long-term career prospects within the organization.

This study proposes that to retain graduate employees in their posts, organizations must adopt an integrated plan that covers both the graduates' immediate workplace experiences and long-term career needs. The study argues against using isolated, standalone measures. Implementing satisfaction improvement programs alongside credible, accessible career development opportunities can strengthen organizational commitment, reduce early staff turnover, retain core talent, and support an organization's sustainable development.

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