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Unveiling Turnover Intentions in Chinese Private Universities: A Two-Round Delphi Consensus Study

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Abstract

Maintaining a committed and capable workforce has become essential within China's rapidly evolving and highly competitive education industry. High employee turnover poses substantial challenges for institutions pursuing international standards, influencing operational stability and educational outcomes. This research investigates the determinants of turnover intention in Chinese academic organizations and ranks these determinants according to their relative importance. A two-round Delphi approach was applied to gather and refine expert insights through repeated consultation. Nineteen specialists from private educational institutions in Fuzhou, China, were selected through purposeful sampling complemented by snowball techniques. During the initial round, experts identified factors contributing to turnover intentions, which were subsequently examined using thematic analysis. In the second round, these factors were ordered from highest to lowest priority. The findings highlight five major dimensions shaping turnover intentions, presented by significance: (1) compensation, benefits, and employee acknowledgment; (2) possibilities for career progression and promotion; (3) professional development, training, and employment stability; (4) leadership, managerial backing, and organizational culture; and (5) work-life balance and workplace conditions. The study offers practical recommendations aimed at recognizing and mitigating the drivers of employee turnover. These insights provide meaningful guidance for Chinese educational institutions, emphasizing the value of employee satisfaction and contributing to the cultivation of a stable and motivated workforce.

Keywords: Turnover intentions, Private education institutions, Delphi method, China, Employment policy

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Introduction

The fields of education and training have long held widespread importance, drawing continuous attention. With continual technological progress, the need for highly skilled individuals has intensified, reinforcing the relevance of lifelong learning and the ongoing expansion of adult education [1-3]. In contemporary China, parents' exceptional focus on their children's academic performance has accelerated the growth of the national education sector. This momentum has notably broadened the private education market, which now offers extensive and specialized training services. Despite this growth, retaining employees in private institutions has become increasingly difficult. The China Employment Market Prosperity Report for 2022 underscored persistent challenges in China's job market, noting that private education and training organizations face strong demand for skilled personnel. Although some workforce mobility may yield organizational benefits, excessive turnover often proves harmful, disrupting stability and diminishing the quality of instruction.

Private educational organizations in China encounter particular pressures that intensify turnover tendencies. Such institutions frequently operate under intense competition and elevated performance demands, resulting in turnover patterns that differ

substantially from those observed in public institutions [4]. While public schools may struggle with bureaucratic procedures and limited monetary incentives, private organizations must compete in a market characterized by high expectations for quality and institutional appeal [5].

According to the 2023 Zhaopin report, turnover in fields including culture, sports, education, and media consistently surpasses 20%, highlighting the prominence of this issue within the private education sector. The situation is further complicated by internal factors such as employment stability, remuneration, and advancement possibilities. For instance, early childhood teachers in urban private institutions in Shenzhen have faced turnover levels between 12% and 14%, often driven by staffing shortages and inadequate support [6].

Despite the significance of these concerns, research focusing specifically on turnover within China's private education system remains limited. This gap restricts the development of targeted retention strategies that account for the distinctive operational challenges faced by these organizations [7-9]. Addressing this deficiency, the present study examines the influences on turnover intention among employees in China's private education institutions. By concentrating exclusively on this sector, the research seeks to generate evidence-based insights that support effective retention efforts and illuminate the unique dynamics shaping turnover intentions across this vital segment of China's educational environment.

Present study

This research investigates the elements shaping turnover intentions among staff working in private education organizations, with specific attention given to Fuzhou City, China. Using the Delphi technique, expert insights were gathered and refined through repeated rounds of evaluation. The study's main goals are to identify the key influencing factors and to arrange them according to their relative importance.

Understanding and addressing these intentions can help institutions design targeted strategies that strengthen satisfaction, involvement, and long-term retention. More broadly, this work aims to provide foundational evidence for developing data-driven retention practices suited to China's private education sector. From a theoretical perspective, the study examines how turnover intentions emerge within educational contexts, filling existing research gaps and offering a more comprehensive analytical lens. The investigation centers on two guiding research questions:

1. Which factors have a substantial impact on turnover intentions in China's private education sector?
2. How consistent are the rankings of these identified factors?

Several possible contributors are expected to influence turnover intentions, including job satisfaction, work-life balance, leadership quality, career development routes, organizational climate, and compensation systems. The Delphi method's step-by-step process helps determine and prioritize these variables.

Fuzhou City is selected as the research location. As a second-tier urban center in China, Fuzhou reported a population of roughly 8.6 million in 2022 and maintains a diverse educational ecosystem. The city hosts thousands of training institutions, with more than 100 focusing specifically on foreign language instruction—approximately one-tenth of the total. Data will be collected in two stages from chosen experts whose insights reflect the unique educational characteristics of Fuzhou. The resulting findings are intended to support the development of retention measures within the city and contribute to broader discussions on turnover intentions in educational environments.

Literature Review

The conceptualization of turnover intentions and their impact on educational settings

Scholarly interest in employee turnover has a long history, with foundational studies from the twentieth century offering early theoretical perspectives. Porter and Steers [10] initiated dialogue on emotional strain in the workplace, suggesting that such strain fosters internal resistance that, combined with appealing alternatives elsewhere, can lead to the desire to resign. Mobley *et al.* [11] later defined turnover intention as a signal of employee dissatisfaction and readiness to seek employment elsewhere. Dalton and Todor [12] distinguished between functional and dysfunctional turnover, noting the different implications each has for organizational well-being.

The education sector globally continues to experience considerable turnover, prompting extensive investigation [13, 14]. This trend underscores the influence of factors such as leadership style, workplace conditions, and remuneration on educators' decisions to remain or exit. For example, Dutta and Sahney [13] demonstrated that directive leadership tendencies heighten turnover among teachers. The broader work environment—including organizational culture, collegial interactions, and resource availability—also shapes teachers' daily experiences and contributes to their intention to leave [15]. Compensation, particularly satisfaction with salary, has been found to mediate the connection between perceived organizational fairness and turnover intention, emphasizing its pivotal role [16].

The determinants of turnover intentions

Recent studies commonly assess turnover through voluntary separations, with turnover intention being a central variable [17]. A strong consensus has emerged that these intentions correlate closely with actual departures [18, 19], and Kim *et al.* [17] reported that turnover intention predicts leaving behavior more effectively than either commitment or job satisfaction. Price's [20] model offers a comprehensive framework by integrating insights from economics and sociology, highlighting the influence of environmental, personal, and structural conditions, with job satisfaction and organizational commitment functioning as mediating elements. Price also stresses the importance of job-search activities when estimating turnover likelihood.

Nevertheless, turnover intentions result from a complex blend of societal, organizational, and individual drivers [8, 9]. Societal influences include cultural norms and economic conditions, while organizational aspects encompass workplace culture, compensation systems, and operational climate [15, 17]. Individual-level determinants include demographic attributes such as age, gender, and family responsibilities [17, 21, 22]. More integrated approaches have emerged, examining how employees and organizations interact dynamically. Salary satisfaction has been shown to mediate the link between organizational justice and turnover intention [16]. Additionally, teaching styles—whether teacher-centered or student-centered—affect teachers' sense of efficacy and interpersonal interactions, influencing their likelihood of staying [23]. Global disruptions such as the COVID-19 pandemic have further intensified educator stress, contributing to burnout and elevated intentions to leave the profession [14].

Despite substantial work on turnover intentions, more clarity is needed regarding how these issues unfold within China's private education sector [24-26]. This study addresses that gap by examining how the known drivers of turnover intentions operate specifically in Chinese private schools, shaped by rapid regulatory adjustments, cultural norms, and national economic trends. By doing so, it expands current discussions and offers a more detailed picture of turnover in these institutions. This focus is particularly relevant because differences between public and private education are often underestimated in broader investigations [27]. By centering these distinctive conditions, the research strengthens the literature, identifies challenges unique to private-sector educators in China, and provides guidance that managers and policymakers can use to curb turnover and strengthen instructional quality. Understanding employees' decisions to leave requires viewing personal motives, organizational settings, and societal factors together [28]. This work contributes to that need by analyzing how these components emerge within private Chinese educational organizations, offering value for both scholarly inquiry and practical educational leadership.

Methods

Research design

A two-round Delphi approach was adopted to explore determinants of turnover intentions among staff in Chinese private education institutions, as shown in **Figure 1**. This qualitative forecasting method compiles independent expert viewpoints [29] by obtaining structured input through tools such as questionnaires [30]. **Figure 1** outlines the steps of the Delphi procedure and underscores its usefulness for generating judgments or projections in varied fields.

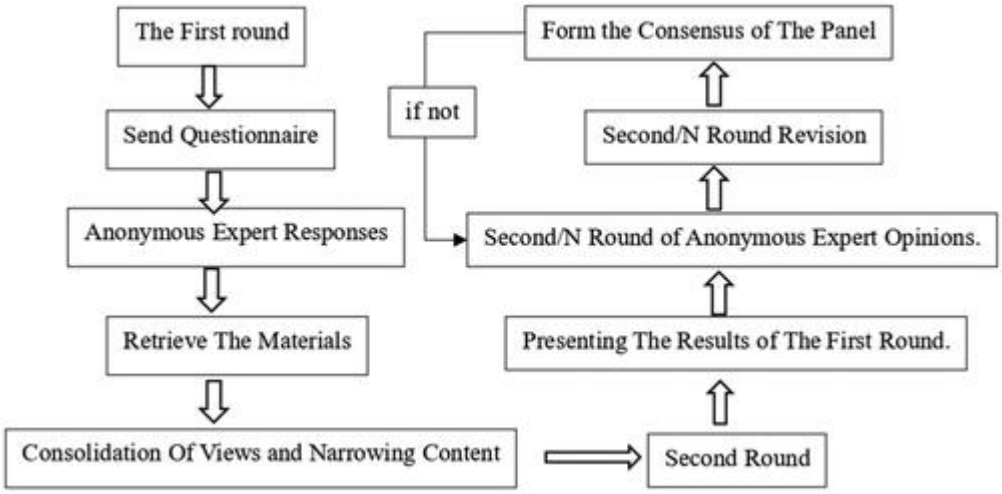

Figure 1. Flowchart of Delphi Method

This technique is particularly suited for examining subjects marked by disagreement or uncertainty and is appropriate when direct empirical evidence is limited, which aligns with this study's context. Using a mixed-methods framework, qualitative insights and quantitative measures were integrated to capture the factors shaping turnover intentions among private-sector teaching personnel. This combination improves overall interpretation—qualitative data adds situational depth, whereas

quantitative outcomes establish statistical links [31]. Comparing thematic findings with numerical analyses enhances the study's rigor [32].

Sampling design and data collection

Purposeful and snowball sampling were combined to form a panel of 40 specialists from private education institutions in the Fuzhou area. Purposeful sampling identified individuals with notable expertise in educational administration who could offer detailed input on turnover. To diversify viewpoints, snowball sampling followed, where initial participants referred colleagues with relevant backgrounds [33]. This blended approach expanded the expert pool and strengthened the range of perspectives, contributing to a more complete evaluation of turnover-related influences. Questionnaires were distributed via email so respondents could complete them within the assigned timeframe.

Experts were also encouraged to propose additional factors they believed relevant but missing from the initial list [34]. This flexible element ensured broad representation of viewpoints and captured newly emerging issues that might be particularly salient in the Fuzhou setting. Consistent with the iterative nature of the Delphi method, the first round sought to identify known elements while also refining or adding new ones [35], leading to a more accurate reflection of current turnover patterns in the region's private schools.

In the second stage, the study evaluated agreement levels based on the refined list from round one. Experts were asked to rank the importance of each dimension [36], producing a prioritized overview of all factors. A ranking protocol was used in which each factor received one distinct numerical rank, preventing duplication and avoiding complications in subsequent analyses [37]. This numeric process enabled a systematic comparison [38], and cumulative rank totals provided insight into collective expert judgments [39].

Because the Delphi method anticipates occasional participant withdrawal [40], its reliability remained intact. Each phase built on the previous round's outputs, ensuring continuity [41]. This structure supported ongoing refinement and consensus formation even when some experts did not continue into later rounds [42].

Ethical considerations

Ethical clearance for this project was obtained from the INTI International University ethics committee (Ref. No. INTI/UEC/2023/030). All experts participating in the study signed written consent forms, confirming their voluntary involvement and their understanding of the study's aims and procedures. Confidentiality was strictly upheld, with all responses anonymized and used solely for research purposes.

Questionnaire

The Delphi questionnaires played a central role in collecting expert viewpoints on the determinants of employee turnover intentions in Chinese private education settings. They were designed to generate structured and detailed feedback across two rounds.

In round 1, the questionnaire functioned as the initial interface with panel members, capturing a broad set of viewpoints on turnover-related elements. This stage relied on open-ended prompts, asking experts to list any factors they considered relevant, supported by thematic hints drawn from recent scholarship. This approach helped frame expert input while also encouraging the introduction of additional, previously unrecognized factors. In round 2, the questionnaire shifted focus to ranking the factors identified earlier. Experts were provided with a synthesized summary of round 1 results, arranged into core dimensions to enhance clarity. They were then instructed to assign unique ranks from most to least critical, with explicit reminders not to repeat rankings. A tabular format was included to organize responses and streamline later analysis, alongside illustrations of correct and incorrect ranking procedures.

Data analysis

Analysis proceeded in two primary steps to thoroughly assess determinants of turnover intentions in private educational institutions. For the first round, thematic analysis was applied to qualitative input obtained from the open-ended responses. Similar responses were grouped into thematic categories, and these themes were used to design the structured questionnaire used in round 2, ensuring all expert-identified items were incorporated.

After the second-round responses were collected, the level of agreement among experts was measured using Kendall's Coefficient of Concordance (W). This statistic evaluates rater agreement when ranking data are involved. To compute Kendall's W, each expert's ordered list of factors was arranged into a matrix with columns representing factors and rows representing expert rankings. Kendall's W was then derived to determine consistency across the panel. Values of W span from 1 (highest agreement) to 5 (lowest agreement), reflecting the degree of shared judgment among experts. A p-value below 0.05 indicates significant agreement, implying that experts relied on comparable criteria [43]. In this study, a strong level of consensus, with W approaching 1, was expected [44]. In contrast, a low W, particularly with a p-value above 0.05, would

demonstrate limited alignment among experts [45]. If such divergence occurred, the possibility of a third Delphi iteration would be considered to strengthen agreement and improve the reliability of findings [46].

Results

First round of the Delphi method

A total of 40 experts were invited to join the Delphi process on 23 June 2023, with invitations issued via email. Of these, 32 agreed to participate in the initial round. During round 1, the experts proposed 32 distinct factors. **Table 1** presents demographic information for the expert group.

Table 1. Experts' profile

No	Experience (in years)	Age	Position
E22	4	35	Fuzhou University
E23	18	48	Fuzhou University
E24	5	32	Fuzhou University
E25	5	35	Fuzhou University
E31	10	39	Minjiang College
E32	6	37	Minjiang College
E1	13	41	New Channel
E2	5	–	New Channel
E10	10	36	New Channel
E19	10	40	New Channel
E3	8	33	New Oriental English School
E7	3	26	New Oriental English School
E8	4	27	New Oriental English School
E9	3	31	New Oriental English School
E12	5	31	New Oriental English School
E13	9	35	New Oriental English School
E14	3	28	New Oriental English School
E21	6	31	New Oriental English School
E26	13	43	FuJian Normal University
E27	14	44	FuJian Normal University
E28	16	44	FuJian Normal University
E29	7	39	FuJian Normal University
E30	15	49	FuJian Normal University
E33	5	38	FuJian Normal University
E5	4	28	Fujian Siming education school
E6	10	40	Fujian Siming education school
E11	5	28	Fujian Siming education school
E17	4	31	FuJian Normal University
E18	7	33	FuJian Normal University
E16	8	32	New Oriental English School

The collected topics were carefully examined through thematic analysis [32]. Ultimately, the items were organized into five dimensions representing the main categories related to employee turnover intentions in China's private education sector. **Table 2** provides details of the classification outcomes.

Table 2. Consolidation of round one Delphi findings

No	Dimensions	Themes
1	Career Development and Advancement Opportunities	• Availability of pathways for career progression• Access to external employment options• How smoothly promotion processes operate• Alignment between job duties and initial expectations• Growth of new institutions offering high incentives to attract staff• Talent recruitment from competing institutions• Perceived respectability of the role
2	Compensation, Benefits, and Employee Recognition	• Salary structure and welfare provisions• Reduced yearly bonus amounts• Whether the organization offers adequate financial rewards• High turnover affecting morale• Competitive performance culture and declining performance metrics
3	Work-life Balance and Work Environment	• Significant job-related pressure• Overly rigid attendance regulations• Extended duty hours• Heavy workload intensity• Repetitive or unvaried tasks• Perceived job stability and security• General workplace atmosphere• Quality of colleague interactions• Labor market demand conditions• Sense of purpose associated with the job

4	Leadership, Management Support, and Organizational Culture	• KPI-driven evaluations• Flawed or incomplete organizational systems• Degree of alignment with company values• Work feeling unengaging• Intense internal competition across institutions• Influence of online public commentary
5	Professional Growth, Training, and Job Security	• Excessive number of monthly required basic courses• Challenges related to student recruitment• Approval status of teaching posts• Concerns regarding job certainty

The initial Delphi round produced five broad categories that encapsulate the different elements shaping employee turnover intentions. These categories were: (1) Career Development and Advancement Opportunities; (2) Compensation, Benefits, and Employee Recognition; (3) Work–Life Balance and Work Environment; (4) Leadership, Management Support, and Organizational Culture; and (5) Professional Growth, Training, and Job Security. Each category included a specific number of underlying themes.

Within Career Development and Advancement Opportunities, seven themes emerged: availability of career progression; alternative employment prospects; clarity of promotional pathways; degree to which job duties align with expectations; growth of new institutions offering attractive incentives; competing institutions attempting to lure staff; and the perceived social respectability of the role.

The Compensation, Benefits, and Employee Recognition category contained five themes: overall pay and benefits; reduced annual bonuses; whether compensation matches responsibilities; worsening morale due to colleagues leaving; and performance pressures linked to declining output.

Ten themes formed the Work–Life Balance and Work Environment category: excessive stress; strict attendance rules; long workdays; intensive workloads; repetitive job tasks; job security and safety; general workplace climate; quality of interactions with coworkers; job market demands; and the sense of meaning attached to the work.

In the Leadership, Management Support, and Organizational Culture category, six themes were identified: KPI-driven assessment; shortcomings in organizational systems; acceptance of the workplace culture; perceptions of dull or unstimulating work; intense competition among institutions; and public commentary online.

The Professional Growth, Training, and Job Security category included four themes: heavy monthly teaching requirements; enrollment challenges; approval of classroom assignments; and concerns about job stability.

Second round of the Delphi method

The second phase began on 1 August 2023. The findings from the first round were reorganized into the five categories, and the same experts were contacted to rank these categories according to their significance in shaping turnover intentions in China's private education sector. They were reminded that rankings reflected individual professional judgment and that each number from 1 to 5 must be used once.

As presented in **Table 3**, a total of 19 experts completed the second-round ranking. The Delphi process is typically more reliable when participants share some professional similarity [47]. It should also be noted that eight experts did not continue after round one, and another eight did not take part in round two; their withdrawal—likely due to workload or other obligations—was acknowledged [48].

Table 3. Second round of the Delphi method

Experts	Work-life balance and work environment	Compensation, benefits, and employee recognition	Career development and advancement opportunities	Professional growth, training, and job security	Leadership, management support, & organizational culture
E1	5	3	1	4	2
E3	4	3	2	1	5
E4	4	2	3	1	5
E5	2	5	1	4	3
E6	4	1	2	3	5
E7	3	1	2	5	4
E8	5	1	2	3	4
E9	5	1	2	3	2
E10	3	2	1	5	4
E11	5	2	1	3	4
E12	2	1	3	5	4
E13	4	1	3	5	2
E17	3	5	1	4	2
E18	5	2	1	3	4
E19	3	4	5	1	2
E20	2	4	1	5	3

E21	3	1	2	5	4
E28	4	1	5	2	3
E31	5	1	4	2	3
Mean	3.74	2.16	2.24	3.42	3.45
Group Rank	5	1	2	3	4

The mean values for the five categories ranged from 2.24 to 3.74. The priority order was: Compensation, benefits, and employee recognition (2.16); Career development and advancement opportunities (2.24); Professional growth, training, and job security (3.42); Leadership, management support, and organizational culture (3.45); and Work–life balance and work environment (3.74).

A Kendall's W of 0.222 with a p-value of 0.002 indicates a meaningful level of agreement among participants. Since this reflects a stable consensus, no additional Delphi round was required.

Discussions

The results position the five dimensions in the following priority sequence: (1) compensation, benefits, and employee recognition; (2) career development and advancement opportunities; (3) professional growth, training, and job security; (4) leadership, management support, and organizational culture; and (5) work–life balance and work environment. This ranking indicates that pay-related matters and recognition mechanisms carry the greatest influence on turnover intentions among employees in China's private education sector.

Compensation, benefits, and employee recognition

Employee commitment is strongly shaped by what they perceive they receive in return for their work—both financially and in terms of acknowledgment. In the competitive setting of private education institutions, compensation functions not only as a source of economic stability but also as a signal of an individual's standing and contribution within the organization [49]. The annual bonus is particularly influential; reduced year-end rewards in some institutions can heighten the desire to leave [50]. Within China, such bonuses often represent more than an income supplement—they convey appreciation and institutional respect [51]. When employees view their bonuses as insufficient relative to their efforts, morale declines, increasing interest in alternative employment.

A recurring issue is whether the rewards provided by an institution align with an employee's perceived worth. When a disconnect occurs, trust in the organization's ability to support long-term development and financial stability may erode [52]. This erosion often becomes visible when many colleagues resign in close succession. High turnover within a short period can undermine the motivation of remaining staff and raise concerns about institutional direction and sustainability [53].

Furthermore, performance-driven cultures in private education can intensify turnover intentions. Declines in performance—whether individual or departmental—may contribute to a cycle of falling motivation, fewer incentives, and reduced job satisfaction. Constant comparisons with peers can push individuals to seek workplaces where evaluation standards feel fairer or less competitive [54].

Career development and advancement opportunities

Turnover is a pressing issue in China's fast-evolving private education landscape, where several interrelated elements shape employees' decisions to stay or leave [55]. In this study, opportunities for career advancement and ongoing development were notable predictors of turnover intentions. Employees today emphasize continuous improvement, and staff within private institutions tend to value employers who invest in skill-building and professional expansion [56]. Promotion-related factors play an essential role; accessible and transparent advancement pathways generally encourage retention, whereas unclear or politicized promotion systems push employees toward other options [57].

Matching job expectations with actual responsibilities also matters. Misalignment can generate dissatisfaction and greater openness to external opportunities. The availability of positions outside the institution—especially those offered by new educational enterprises with generous compensation packages—contributes to higher turnover. These organizations often attract talent aggressively, contributing to a widening talent drain in the sector [58].

Job decency remains a significant intrinsic motivator. Many educators seek meaningful and intellectually engaging work rather than purely financial rewards. In contrast, a lack of job rotation or limited opportunities to shift roles may create stagnation and diminish long-term interest in remaining at the institution [59].

When considering a move, employees weigh both financial and non-financial costs. Relocating for a new role can involve expenses, emotional challenges, and adaptation to a new environment. However, when perceived benefits exceed these costs, many educators still view the transition as worthwhile.

Professional growth, training, and job security

Understanding why educators in China's private education sector consider leaving requires a deeper examination of the core drivers rather than surface-level explanations. The interplay among workload expectations, enrollment demands, and employment stability offers a layered picture of the pressures teachers face [60]. Such insight enables the design of targeted reforms. In practice, teachers are required to complete numerous compulsory foundational courses each month, which reduces the time they can dedicate to scholarly work, pedagogical innovation, or course improvement. Constant engagement with these basic modules can also trigger exhaustion and lower motivation, which in turn may increase the likelihood of departure [61].

Enrollment-related issues add another dimension of strain. In a competitive educational market, student recruitment directly influences institutional standing as well as access to resources. Because funding models are tied to enrollment outcomes, universities are under continuous pressure to secure capable students [62]. These dynamics may leave educators uncertain about the stability of their roles.

Concerns about job protection, continuity, and stability are intertwined. Governance structures, regulatory shifts, and broader political directions shape China's private education environment. Approval or denial of a teaching position can significantly alter career pathways [63]. Although these decisions may seem administrative, they strongly shape one's sense of inclusion and institutional value. Ambiguity surrounding the boundaries between insecurity and instability further heightens unease [64]. While the former relates to fears of sudden dismissal, the latter reflects broader concerns about future advancement and career development.

Leadership, management support, & organizational culture

Heavy reliance on Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) can narrow educators' priorities to quantifiable outputs, often at the expense of holistic professional growth [65]. When metrics dominate evaluation systems, teachers may feel pressured to fulfill numerical goals rather than pursue meaningful teaching or reflective practice, potentially fostering discontent. Ineffective administrative processes can intensify this problem. In environments where systems lack clarity or efficiency, educators may perceive their work as constrained, diminishing trust and reducing institutional engagement [66].

Alignment with organizational culture also plays a critical role. Employees who genuinely identify with institutional values typically show stronger commitment [67]. Conversely, misalignment may lead to emotional distance and higher turnover. Repetition in daily tasks is another influential factor often ignored in discussions of attrition [68]. A sense of monotonous work can erode enthusiasm, prompting individuals to consider alternatives elsewhere.

Institutional involution—where organizations continuously compete without generating real progress—adds further discouragement [69]. When such cycles persist, educators may question the value of remaining in an environment with limited advancement.

In the digital era, online public opinion holds powerful sway. Negative portrayals or commentary can undermine staff morale and deter new applicants, weakening retention efforts [70]. Given the influence of internet discourse, proactive reputation management is essential for institutions committed to attracting and retaining qualified professionals.

Work-life balance and work environment

One persistent issue in academic careers is the intensity of work demands. The combination of performance expectations and sustained pressure illustrates how demanding these roles can be, requiring both specialized competence and consistent high-level output [71]. Extended hours and fast-paced workloads may heighten stress, which—if unchecked—can increase intentions to leave. Attendance rules also play an important part. As modern workplaces increasingly promote flexibility and better integration of personal and professional life, rigid attendance systems may seem outdated and reduce overall satisfaction [72]. When strict routines are paired with repetitive daily tasks, employees may feel stalled in their development and start looking for roles offering variety and growth.

The work atmosphere, although less quantifiable, is equally influential. Interactions among colleagues and the general climate shape how employees experience their jobs [73]. Supportive relationships foster cooperation and raise morale, whereas tension-filled environments can prompt individuals to seek change. Perceptions of stability in private educational organizations also strongly affect turnover decisions. In markets where job demand fluctuates, employees are more likely to stay when they feel their position is secure. Conversely, when the wider labor market presents more appealing alternatives, the cost of switching decreases [74]. These choices are closely related to how people interpret the role of work in their lives. If their position lacks meaning or alignment with personal aims, they are more likely to explore other opportunities.

Conclusion, Limitations, and Future Recommendations

This study analyzes the drivers of turnover intention in Chinese academic institutions using the Delphi method. As contemporary Chinese families invest heavily in their children's schooling, the education sector has expanded rapidly. Yet

this growth brings challenges, particularly the need to retain skilled staff, which directly affects how effectively institutions function. Persistent turnover disrupts organizational stability, increases financial costs, and affects educational continuity. To better understand this issue, the study employed a qualitative Delphi approach to gather expert perspectives on the causes of employee turnover. The method was selected to capture insights from diverse specialists and provide a comprehensive overview of influential factors. After two Delphi rounds, agreement was reached among 40 experts. Their evaluation ranked the five dimensions as follows: (1) compensation, benefits, and employee recognition; (2) career development and advancement opportunities; (3) professional growth, training, and job security; (4) leadership, management support, and organizational culture; and (5) work-life balance and work environment. Compensation, benefits, and recognition emerged as the strongest determinant, which aligns with China's cultural and economic context. Bonuses and other forms of reward symbolize both financial support and institutional appreciation. Additionally, as living expenses have risen sharply in the past decade, employees increasingly recognize the importance of pay and benefits for their well-being.

In contrast, work-life balance and work environment were rated least influential. This aligns with cultural expectations in China, where professional duty often outweighs personal considerations, leading many employees to tolerate long hours or less favorable environments. The study extends theoretical understanding of turnover intention in Chinese educational settings by emphasizing how cultural norms shape workplace perceptions. It also offers practical insights, suggesting that policymakers should prioritize comprehensive compensation systems and recognition strategies. Moreover, administrators should develop a strong grasp of cultural values and embed them in retention efforts.

Several limitations must be noted. First, the findings are derived from the socioeconomic and cultural setting of Fuzhou, which limits broader generalization. China's significant regional differences mean that conclusions drawn here may not fully apply elsewhere. The study also does not include comparisons with other types of educational systems, domestically or internationally, which could provide additional context.

Future studies should broaden geographic coverage, incorporating varied regions across China, including both urban and rural settings. Comparative investigations across different kinds of educational institutions—public and private, and across diverse levels—would also strengthen understanding. Longitudinal approaches and quantitative instruments informed by this study's findings could help track how turnover intentions shift over time. These expansions would enable richer insights and support global educational institutions in crafting more effective retention strategies.

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