



PRODUCTIVITY OF INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER LEARNING: INSTITUTIONAL CULTURE, MENTAL HEALTH, WORK-LIFE BALANCE AND EMPLOYEE RETENTION: PERSPECTIVES FROM PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES IN KENYA: A PRAGMATIC APPROACH

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Article DOI: <https://doi.org/10.36713/epra25543>

DOI No: 10.36713/epra25543

ABSTRACT

This research was directed by four primary objectives. This study aimed to analyse the impact of institutional culture on employee retention within private universities in Kenya. The second aimed to evaluate the moderating effect of mental health on the relationship between institutional culture and employee retention. The third objective was to determine the moderating effect of work-life balance on employee retention. The study aimed to investigate the combined impact of institutional culture, mental health, and work-life balance on employee retention in these institutions. Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Theory and the Social Exchange Theory were utilized to explain the phenomena. The study utilised both qualitative and quantitative methods for data collection. This study employed a pragmatic research approach, emphasizing that the significance of inquiry is rooted in its practical outcomes and applicability in real-world contexts. This research, adhering to the stated philosophy, did not include the collection of primary data. The study utilised solely secondary data sourced from existing empirical studies, policy documents, scholarly journals, and institutional reports pertaining to private universities in Kenya. The emphasis was on synthesising evidence concerning institutional culture, mental health, work-life balance, and employee retention. These factors are essential for comprehending productivity in higher education institutions. Secondary sources were systematically identified and reviewed through academic databases and digital libraries, ensuring a diverse array of peer-reviewed materials that provided both theoretical and contextual insights. The analysis employed thematic content analysis, facilitating the identification of recurring patterns, relationships, and gaps in the literature. Themes were analysed in relation to the research objectives to derive conclusions and develop evidence-based recommendations. This methodology is consistent with the pragmatic paradigm, focussing on actionable knowledge obtained from credible, context-specific sources instead of abstract theorisation or direct fieldwork. The results indicated that institutional culture significantly and positively impacted employee retention. Universities characterised by inclusive, transparent, and participatory cultures exhibited reduced turnover intentions among staff. Mental health significantly moderates employee commitment and productivity. Access to psychological support services and wellness programs enhances these outcomes, even in institutions with moderate ratings of institutional culture. Work-life balance emerged as a significant factor, moderating the effects of institutional demands and stressors on retention. Employees who indicated flexible work schedules and support for family or personal commitments demonstrated increased job satisfaction and organisational loyalty. Institutional culture, mental health, and work-life balance collectively explained a significant portion of the variance in employee retention rates. The analysis indicated that these variables interacted in complex yet complementary manners, underscoring the necessity for an integrated approach to human resource management in private universities. The research findings indicate that private universities in Kenya should emphasise employee well-being, foster organisational inclusivity, and implement flexible work policies to enhance staff retention and, consequently, institutional productivity. University leadership should invest in formal mental health programs, cultivate supportive workplace cultures, and implement work-life policies that address the diverse needs of academic and administrative staff. Future research should investigate the longitudinal effects of these factors on institutional performance and broaden the scope to include public universities for comparative analysis. Institutional culture significantly influences mental health, work-life balance, employee retention, and overall institutional productivity.

1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Institutions of higher learning are facing heightened scrutiny regarding their productivity, as stakeholders aim to identify the factors that contribute to institutional effectiveness and academic excellence. In a competitive and rapidly evolving global

educational landscape, higher education institutions (HEIs) face pressure to provide quality teaching, conduct impactful research, and engage effectively with the community. The internal organisational dynamics influencing staff performance and institutional outcomes are undergoing urgent reassessment.



Institutional culture, mental health, work-life balance, and employee retention are critical factors influencing the effectiveness of institutions in achieving their academic and social missions (Chan & Auster, 2019). The variables, frequently analysed separately, interact in intricate manners that significantly affect employee morale, engagement, and overall institutional productivity (Martins & Terblanche, 2020). Institutional culture encompasses the collective beliefs, values, norms, and practices that influence behaviour within an academic organisation. This influences decision-making processes, conflict management, and the interactions between staff and faculty. An effective institutional culture promotes inclusivity, collaboration, transparency, and respect for academic freedom, resulting in an environment conducive to creativity and productivity (Yusoff et al., 2021). A dysfunctional culture characterised by hierarchy, inadequate recognition, or ineffective communication can result in disengagement, increased stress, and higher turnover rates, thereby reducing institutional productivity. The establishment of a supportive and positive institutional culture significantly enhances innovation, job satisfaction, and the overall performance of academic communities (Alshammari et al., 2024).

Mental health within academic settings has emerged as a significant issue, especially given the rising demands on faculty and staff. It includes psychological well-being, emotional resilience, and the capacity to manage the stressors associated with academic life. Prioritising mental health through institutional support mechanisms, including accessible counselling services, mental health awareness training, and fostering a culture of openness, is essential. Employee engagement, motivation, and productivity are positively correlated (Hazel et al., 2022). Poor mental health is associated with absenteeism, presenteeism, and reduced cognitive function, all of which hinder productivity. Research indicates that institutions must implement proactive mental health policies, not only as a moral obligation but also as a means to enhance institutional efficiency and sustainability (Kinman & Johnson, 2019). Work-life balance, defined as the equilibrium between professional responsibilities and personal life, significantly influences the experiences of academic staff. In higher education, the demands of teaching, publishing, administrative responsibilities, and mentorship frequently exceed personal limits. Institutions that promote flexible scheduling, acknowledge family responsibilities, and enforce policies to mitigate overwork generally report reduced burnout rates and increased staff satisfaction (Zhou & Zhang, 2023). A healthy work-life balance fosters cognitive clarity, emotional stability, and sustained commitment to institutional objectives, thereby improving productivity. Recent research indicates that employees who recognise fairness and balance in their work arrangements tend to be more innovative and effective contributors to their organisations (Kalliath, Hughes, & Newcombe, 2021).

Employee retention refers to an institution's capacity to sustain a stable and committed workforce, serving as both an outcome and a factor influencing institutional health. This indicates the extent to which an organisation fulfils the professional and emotional

requirements of its employees. Retention is affected by various factors, such as job satisfaction, opportunities for career advancement, alignment with organisational values, and the quality of interpersonal relationships in the workplace (Jung & Lee, 2020). High retention rates maintain institutional memory, lower recruitment and training expenses, and ensure continuity in research and teaching. Organisations that implement retention strategies, such as mentoring programs, recognition systems, and career development initiatives, can sustain a high-performing workforce that enhances long-term productivity (Price et al., 2022). This study is driven by the increasing acknowledgement that the sustainability of higher education institutions is fundamentally linked to their internal human resource dynamics. With the intensification of global competition and the evolution of educational models in response to technological and societal changes, higher education institutions must reconsider their support for staff. Examining the interconnections among institutional culture, mental health, work-life balance, and employee retention provides a framework for fostering resilient and productive academic communities. The variables discussed are concrete factors that, when effectively utilised, can enhance the organisational capacity of institutions to innovate, adapt, and succeed in a complex environment (Giorgi et al., 2020). This study seeks to produce evidence-based recommendations for guiding policy and practice in higher education by examining these interconnected factors (Sabagh, Hall, & Saroyan, 2018).

Private universities in Kenya have significantly contributed to the expansion of access to higher education, addressing the growing demand that public institutions have been unable to fulfil. The private sector emerged in the late 1980s and early 1990s, now constituting a substantial segment of the nation's higher education system, providing diverse programs in fields such as business, information technology, health sciences, and theology (Odhiambo, 2018). The expansion of private universities has been influenced by government policies that have liberalised the education sector, heightened social demand for university education, and a growing middle class desiring more personalised and flexible learning environments (Mwiria & Ng'ethe, 2019). Private universities in Kenya are competing for students, academic staff, research funding, and international partnerships, thereby establishing themselves as significant contributors to national development through knowledge production and human capital formation (Nganga, 2021). Despite their contributions, private universities in Kenya encounter significant challenges that directly impact their productivity. A significant constraint is the limitation of financial resources, impacting infrastructure development, research capacity, and the recruitment and retention of qualified faculty. In contrast to public institutions that receive direct government funding, private universities primarily rely on tuition fees, rendering them susceptible to economic variations and changes in student enrolment (Waweru & Otenyo, 2020). The financial instability has frequently resulted in an excessive dependence on part-time faculty, diminished investment in research, and limited capacity to recruit top talent or provide competitive salaries,



consequently impacting the quality and continuity of academic programs (Gudo, Olel, & Oanda, 2019). Regulatory challenges exacerbate the situation, as private universities are required to meet the same accreditation and quality assurance standards as public institutions, yet they do not receive comparable levels of state support.

The dynamic higher education landscape, influenced by globalisation, digital transformation, and evolving labour market requirements, offers both opportunities and challenges for private universities in Kenya. Institutions adopting e-learning platforms, engaging in international collaborations, and implementing competency-based education models have sustained a competitive advantage, particularly in urban areas (Mutula, 2023). The rapid pace of change has exposed institutional inertia and systemic inefficiencies, especially regarding the adaptation to technology-enhanced learning and the alignment of curriculum with contemporary socio-economic needs (Mabuka & Ochieng, 2021). Numerous institutions face challenges in achieving a balance between academic excellence and commercial viability, as the pursuit of profitability can occasionally undermine educational integrity. Governance issues further complicate the situation, as weak leadership structures and limited stakeholder engagement undermine strategic planning and institutional sustainability (Oanda & Jowi, 2022). The productivity of Kenya's private universities depends on their capacity to cultivate inclusive institutional cultures, enhance mental well-being, and improve staff working conditions. Research indicates that the organisational environment, characterised by transparent communication, participatory governance, and employee recognition, is crucial for improving institutional performance and staff retention (Karimi & Njihia, 2024). Internal factors significantly affect the motivation and performance of both academic and non-academic staff. Kenya's ambition to establish itself as a regional education hub hinge on the strategic positioning and sustained productivity of private universities, which will rely on both external competitiveness and the internal coherence and resilience of their institutional ecosystems (Wekesa & Kiriungi, 2020).

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Concerns regarding the productivity of private universities in Kenya arise from a combination of internal institutional challenges and external pressures that have notably affected their capacity to provide quality education and maintain academic excellence. The Commission for University Education (2023) indicates that Kenya has more than 35 chartered private universities, which represent around 30% of student enrolment in higher education. Despite this significant contribution, recent trends indicate concerning inefficiencies in staff performance, institutional management, and academic output, which jeopardise the long-term sustainability of these institutions. A 2022 survey conducted by the Universities Fund Kenya indicated that approximately 62% of academic staff in private universities identified poor work-life balance and insufficient mental health support as significant demotivators. Additionally, 48% reported

dissatisfaction with the existing institutional culture and leadership structures (Universities Fund, 2022). These figures highlight a crisis in human resource management and reveal systemic gaps that require academic investigation and policy intervention.

A study by Ooko and Ochieng (2019) indicates that institutional culture in numerous private universities is marked by rigid hierarchies, a lack of participatory decision-making, and inconsistent performance management systems. Their findings suggest that this culture has demoralised faculty, hindered collaboration, and resulted in a decrease in innovation within academic departments. Nonetheless, their study did not incorporate a multidimensional framework, overlooking the interaction between institutional culture, psychological well-being, and work-life dynamics. Kariuki et al. (2020) investigated job satisfaction among lecturers in private universities, revealing that more than 55% of respondents reported moderate to high stress levels, attributed to excessive workloads and ambiguous career progression pathways. Their analysis, while insightful, primarily concentrated on job satisfaction metrics, neglecting a deeper exploration of mental health and retention strategies, which limits its explanatory power concerning overall institutional productivity. Wambua and Mutua (2021) examined burnout among academic staff in private universities located in Nairobi, revealing that 67% of the staff experienced symptoms of emotional exhaustion and depersonalisation. Their research effectively emphasised mental health as a significant issue but did not examine the impact of organisational support systems or leadership responses. Njoroge and Kamau (2023) investigated employee retention and identified uncompetitive remuneration and restricted career mobility as significant factors contributing to elevated turnover rates. This study provided important statistical data; however, it did not examine the impact of softer organisational factors, such as culture, wellness programs, or work-life balance, on employee retention—areas that the current research aims to investigate comprehensively.

Gitonga and Wanjiru (2020) conducted a study assessing productivity among academic staff in private universities, identifying low performance levels as a result of insufficient research funding and a lack of incentives for innovation. This study identified significant resource gaps but did not evaluate the psycho-social environment in which the staff members function. Mwangi and Karani (2018) examined leadership styles in private universities, finding that autocratic leadership was particularly prevalent in faith-based institutions. Their work illuminated governance issues but concentrated primarily on leadership style, overlooking wider organisational culture factors that influence productivity. Omondi and Nyaga (2022) examined the impact of institutional policies on faculty engagement, revealing that the majority of private universities did not have formal wellness programs or organised work-life support systems. Their study effectively identified policy gaps; however, it did not investigate the cumulative impact of these issues on employee retention or institutional performance.



A recent mixed-methods study by Akinyi and Kiptoo (2024) identified a correlation between inadequate work-life balance and heightened absenteeism among staff in Christian universities. Their findings, while compelling, are constrained by a narrow sample base and a focus on religious institutions, which limits the generalisability of their conclusions to the wider context of private universities in Kenya. This study addresses existing research gaps by providing an integrated examination of the productivity of private universities in Kenya, focussing on the relationships among institutional culture, mental health, work-life balance, and employee retention. This investigation will employ a systems-thinking perspective, contrasting with previous studies that have utilised a siloed or issue-specific approach, to elucidate how these variables collectively influence institutional performance. The study is warranted by the pressing need to improve academic quality and operational effectiveness in private universities, particularly in light of Kenya's Vision 2030 and the nation's goal of becoming a knowledge-based economy. The findings will contribute to scholarly discourse and inform policy reforms and institutional strategies to enhance productivity in higher education within the private sector.

The research objectives that guided this study were to;

- (i) Examine the influence of institutional culture and employee retention in private universities in Kenya.
- (ii) Assess the moderating role of mental health and employee retention in private universities in Kenya.
- (iii) Establish the moderating role of work-life balance and employee retention in private universities in Kenya.
- (iv) To examine the joint effect of institutional culture, mental health and work-life balance on employee retention in private universities in Kenya.

2.0 THEORETICAL REVIEW

The productivity of higher learning institutions, in relation to institutional culture, mental health, work-life balance, and employee retention, can be effectively analysed through the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Theory and the Social Exchange Theory. The Job Demands-Resources Theory was formulated by Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, and Schaufeli in 2001. The theory is based on the premise that each occupation possesses distinct job demands and resources that affect employee well-being and performance. Job demands encompass the physical, psychological, social, or organisational elements of a position that necessitate continuous effort, leading to physiological and psychological costs, including stress and burnout. Job resources encompass organisational, social, and personal factors that facilitate employees in attaining work objectives, alleviating job demands, and promoting personal growth and development. The fundamental principle of the JD-R Theory posits that high job demands, when not supported by adequate job resources, result in burnout and diminished mental health. Conversely, ample job resources promote engagement, motivation, productivity, and employee retention. This study identifies private universities in Kenya as having elevated teaching workloads, research pressures, administrative duties, and performance targets, all of which

represent considerable job demands. Institutional culture, supportive leadership, mental health initiatives, and work-life balance policies are essential job resources. This theory elucidates how a supportive institutional culture and balanced work arrangements can mitigate the adverse effects of job demands on employees' mental health, enhance engagement, and ultimately improve productivity and retention in private universities.

The Social Exchange Theory, proposed by Blau in 1964, posits that social relationships are established through reciprocal exchanges between individuals. The theory posits that individuals participate in relationships when the perceived benefits surpass the costs, and that favourable actions by one party generate an obligation for the other party to reciprocate. In organisational contexts, employees who perceive that their employer values their contributions and prioritises their well-being tend to exhibit positive attitudes and behaviours, including increased commitment, loyalty, and enhanced performance. In contrast, perceived neglect or inequitable treatment results in diminished effort, withdrawal, and increased turnover. In this study, Social Exchange Theory elucidates how institutional culture, mental health support, and work-life balance practices in private universities indicate organisational support for both academic and non-academic staff. When employees view these practices as authentic investments in their well-being, they are likely to respond with heightened productivity, enhanced organisational commitment, and a stronger intention to remain with the institution. The theory offers a clear elucidation of the relationship among supportive institutional practices, employee retention, and overall institutional productivity.

2.1 Literature Review

Numerous studies indicate substantial academic focus on institutional culture, mental health, work-life balance, and employee retention in higher education settings. The studies offer significant insights that frame the research problem being examined in Kenyan private universities and reveal essential knowledge gaps. Johnson and Snyder (2020) examined the influence of institutional culture on faculty retention in private liberal arts colleges in the United States. This research utilised Schein's Organisational Culture Theory and adopted a mixed-methods design, focussing on a population of full-time faculty members. The researchers employed stratified random sampling to engage 300 participants via surveys and interviews. Data were subjected to regression analysis and thematic coding for analysis. The results indicated that institutions characterised by participatory leadership and alignment of values exhibited notably higher retention rates. The study's exclusion of mental health and work-life balance restricts its capacity to comprehensively elucidate the multifactorial influences on retention. A study conducted by Kobayashi and Tanaka (2021) utilised the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model to investigate the impact of mental health on productivity and retention in private universities in Japan. The researchers targeted academic staff from six institutions, utilising purposive sampling to select 250 respondents and employing self-report mental health



inventories alongside institutional performance indicators. Analysis was conducted using Structural Equation Modelling (SEM). The findings indicated that mental exhaustion and anxiety significantly predicted low productivity and the intention to leave. The study enhanced the understanding of psychological stressors but overlooked the roles of institutional culture and work-life balance as contextual buffers, indicating a gap for integrated analyses.

Liu and Zhang (2019) conducted a longitudinal study in China to evaluate the impact of institutional culture and work-life balance on academic staff turnover. The study, based on Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory, employed a quantitative design utilising data from more than 20 private universities and a sample size of 600 respondents. Surveys assessed perceptions of hierarchical rigidity, collectivism, and family-friendly policies. Multivariate regression analysis indicated that collectivist cultures employing flexible scheduling demonstrated enhanced staff retention effectiveness. The study generalised findings across public and private institutions, failing to isolate the private sector for a more nuanced understanding. Ahmad and Rahman (2022) conducted a study in Malaysia examining the effects of work-life balance programs on employee retention and job satisfaction within Islamic private universities. The researchers employed Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory and utilised a cross-sectional design involving 200 respondents, who were selected via convenience sampling. The study utilised Likert-scale questionnaires for data collection, which were subsequently analysed using SPSS. Research indicates that family-friendly policies, on-campus childcare, and flexible working hours substantially improve staff loyalty. However, the study's theoretical framework inadequately addressed cultural dimensions and mental health, thereby constraining its relevance to a wider analysis of institutional productivity. Thompson and Evans (2018) investigated the correlation between mental health initiatives and faculty performance in private universities in Canada. The study employed the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory and utilised a case study methodology, conducting in-depth interviews with 35 academic staff members from two institutions. The findings highlighted the necessity for institutional investment in mental health resources to mitigate burnout and enhance teaching quality. The limited sample size and sole emphasis on qualitative data constrained the generalisability of the findings, and the influence of institutional culture was significantly overlooked.

A study conducted in Denmark by Nielsen and Rasmussen (2023) employed a quantitative design to examine the joint effects of institutional culture and work-life balance on staff retention. Utilising Organisational Support Theory, the researchers conducted a survey of 400 academic staff members through random sampling. Path analysis indicated that perceived organisational support and work-life enrichment significantly affected retention, particularly among mid-career academics. The study excluded mental health as a mediating variable, thereby constraining a comprehensive understanding of the factors

affecting productivity. Martínez and López (2024) employed a phenomenological approach in Spain to investigate the influence of institutional culture on the academic identities of junior faculty in private universities. The study, informed by social identity theory, utilised in-depth interviews with 28 lecturers from three institutions. The analysis indicated that hierarchical and bureaucratic cultures negatively impacted morale and heightened attrition rates. The study presented detailed narratives; however, it lacked quantitative validation and did not include psychological and work-life variables, resulting in an incomplete analysis. Cohen and Levi (2019) conducted a comparative study in Israel that analysed work-life balance practices in religious and secular private universities. The researchers employed role theory to survey 350 academic staff members. ANOVA and regression analyses indicated that secular universities employing non-traditional work arrangements exhibited elevated retention rates. The study did not examine the impact of mental health support or institutional culture on retention, indicating a methodological gap.

Lim and Tan (2025) examined the impact of employee mental health and institutional flexibility on productivity within high-performing private universities in Singapore. The research utilised the Person-Environment Fit theory and employed a concurrent triangulation design. A total of 500 faculty and administrative staff engaged in online surveys and focus group discussions. Findings indicated that the perceived alignment of institutional values with individual needs improved psychological well-being and performance. The omission of work-life balance and the narrow emphasis on faculty roles limit its applicability to wider institutional contexts. Walker and Patel (2023) examined the combined effects of institutional culture, work-life balance, and mental health on faculty commitment within elite private universities in the USA. Employing a structural-functional approach, a survey was conducted with 420 faculty members, and the data were analysed utilising SEM. The study concluded that institutional alignment, mental health resources, and flexible work policies collectively enhanced commitment and decreased turnover. The study, although comprehensive, was restricted to elite institutions, thereby neglecting the challenges encountered by mid-tier or struggling private universities. These ten studies collectively underscore the increasing acknowledgement of the relationship among organisational culture, employee wellness, and institutional productivity. Most studies, however, tend to examine variables in isolation, apply restricted geographical or institutional contexts, or employ designs that lack depth or generalisability. A significant gap exists in the literature that combines the four constructs of institutional culture, mental health, work-life balance, and employee retention into a unified explanatory framework. Additionally, limited research specifically addresses private universities in developing nations like Kenya, where resource limitations and cultural influences may create distinct dynamics. This study addresses existing gaps by providing a thorough, contextually relevant analysis that enhances both theoretical understanding and practical application in higher education management.



Regional studies provide important insights into the intersections of institutional culture, mental health, work-life balance, and employee retention in higher education settings. The studies provide significant contributions; however, they also reveal various knowledge gaps that current research on Kenyan private universities could address. Ali and Saeed (2019) examined the connection between institutional culture and employee retention within private universities in Pakistan. This study investigates the impact of cultural factors, including leadership style, decision-making processes, and communication patterns, on staff retention. Utilising Schein's Organisational Culture Theory, the researchers employed a mixed-methods design. A survey was conducted involving 400 faculty members from five private universities, utilising a random sampling technique, alongside interviews with 20 university leaders. Data were analysed through descriptive statistics and thematic analysis. The research indicated a correlation between participatory leadership and transparent communication with increased retention rates, while bureaucratic practices were associated with elevated turnover intentions. The study did not account for mental health and work-life balance factors, resulting in a notable gap in comprehending the complete range of influences on retention.

An empirical study conducted by Moyo and Mwelase (2020) in South Africa investigated the influence of work-life balance on employee satisfaction and retention within private higher education institutions. The researchers utilised Herzberg's Motivation-Hygiene Theory and implemented a quantitative research design. The study's target population comprised 500 academic staff members from 10 private universities, chosen via simple random sampling. Data collection was conducted via structured questionnaires, and statistical analysis was performed utilising SPSS. The findings indicated that universities providing flexible work schedules, family life support, and mental health resources experienced notably higher employee retention rates. The study was constrained by its singular emphasis on work-life balance, neglecting to incorporate institutional culture or mental health as influencing factors, which may have yielded a more thorough understanding. Gupta and Kumar (2021) conducted a study in India examining the influence of institutional culture and employee mental health on retention rates in private universities. This research employed the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model to investigate the connections among organisational culture, mental health, and employee retention. The study employed a quantitative design, surveying 600 academic staff from private universities in Delhi. Data were collected via questionnaires employing stratified random sampling, and analysis was performed using multiple regression techniques. The research identified supportive institutional culture and mental health programs as significant predictors of employee retention. The study's exclusion of work-life balance as a variable restricts its ability to comprehensively address the various factors influencing retention.

A study conducted by Farid and Rauf (2022) in Afghanistan analysed the interplay between institutional culture, mental

health, and work-life balance, and their effects on the productivity and retention of academic staff. The researchers employed a mixed-methods approach informed by the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory. The study involved a survey of 250 faculty members across eight private universities, complemented by in-depth interviews with 15 department heads. Data analysis was conducted utilising SPSS for quantitative data and NVivo for qualitative data. The research indicated that mental health support services and a robust organisational culture enhanced productivity and retention rates. The study did not investigate the moderating effect of work-life balance, which may offer a more detailed understanding of the relationship between work-related stress, flexibility, and retention. Silva and Pereira (2023) conducted a study in Portugal examining the relationship between work-life balance and employee retention in private universities. The research utilised Social Exchange Theory and adopted a cross-sectional design. A survey was conducted involving 350 academic and administrative staff from five private universities, utilising simple random sampling methods. Data analysis utilised structural equation modelling (SEM), demonstrating that work-life balance significantly influences retention, with flexible working hours and supportive leave policies identified as the most critical factors. The study failed to incorporate institutional culture or mental health into the analysis, neglecting critical factors that could elucidate the complexities of staff retention in academic institutions.

A study conducted in Pakistan by Bashir and Imran (2021) examined the influence of leadership style and institutional culture on employee well-being and retention in private universities. This research employed the Full Range Leadership Model to examine the influence of leadership on employee motivation and retention. A sample of 300 academic staff from four private universities was selected via purposive sampling, and data were gathered using structured questionnaires. The study employed regression analysis to investigate the correlation among leadership, culture, and retention. The research indicated that transformational leadership and a positive organisational culture significantly predicted employee retention. The study did not account for mental health and work-life balance, indicating a potential area for future research to incorporate these elements.

A significant study conducted in South Africa by Van der Merwe and Pretorius (2022) examined the relationship among institutional culture, employee mental health, and retention rates. This research employed a qualitative case study methodology, concentrating on 10 private universities located in the Western Cape. Semi-structured interviews were carried out with 40 faculty members and 10 HR managers. The research indicated that mental health support, including counselling services, significantly contributed to retention, particularly in high-stress settings. Nonetheless, the study failed to assess the direct influence of work-life balance, an essential element in retention, and did not encompass a sufficiently large sample to yield generalisable findings for wider populations.



Patel and Shah (2019) examined the influence of work-life balance on employee retention in private universities in India, employing the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model. A survey was conducted involving 500 academic staff from six private universities in Gujarat, employing a stratified random sampling method. Data were gathered via self-administered questionnaires and analysed using regression analysis. The research indicated a positive correlation between work-life balance, specifically flexible working hours, and increased job satisfaction and retention rates. The study did not incorporate institutional culture or mental health variables, which could enhance the understanding of the factors affecting employee retention. Khalil and Sadaf (2024) conducted a study in Afghanistan that investigated the influence of institutional culture and mental health programs on employee retention in private universities. The study employed a mixed-methods design, grounded in Social Cognitive Theory. The study surveyed 200 academic staff and held focus group discussions with university administrators. Data were analysed employing statistical techniques alongside thematic analysis. The research indicated that robust institutional culture and availability of mental health support services had a significant impact on staff retention. Nonetheless, the analysis did not include work-life balance, thereby constraining the study's comprehensiveness in considering all pertinent factors.

A study conducted in Portugal by Almeida and Silva (2020) examined the influence of institutional culture and mental health programs on faculty retention in private universities. This research employed a qualitative methodology, concentrating on 50 faculty members across three private universities. The findings indicated that faculty members who perceived support from a positive institutional culture and had access to mental health programs reported increased job satisfaction and a reduced likelihood of leaving their institutions. The study did not investigate the influence of work-life balance policies, a significant factor for retention, especially in private universities with constrained resources. In conclusion, these studies reveal various findings regarding the influence of institutional culture, mental health, work-life balance, and employee retention within higher education. Although these studies provide important insights, they frequently neglect to examine all four variables concurrently or concentrate solely on a single aspect of employee retention. Future research must integrate these factors into a comprehensive model, especially in the context of private universities in Kenya, where resource constraints and cultural factors may create distinct dynamics. Additionally, longitudinal studies and a wider array of institutional contexts are essential for obtaining a more comprehensive understanding of the interactions among these variables over time.

Local studies provide important insights into the factors influencing employee retention and productivity in private higher education institutions, yet they also highlight significant knowledge gaps that warrant further investigation. A study conducted by Niyibizi and Kayirangwa (2019) in Rwanda

examined the impact of institutional culture on employee retention in private universities. This study investigates the impact of leadership practices, communication styles, and shared values in universities on staff satisfaction and retention. The study utilised a mixed-methods approach, surveying 200 faculty members from four private universities in Kigali through stratified random sampling. Data collection involved structured questionnaires for quantitative data and semi-structured interviews for qualitative insights. This research utilised Schein's Organisational Culture Theory to elucidate the influence of culture on employee retention. The findings indicated that a robust organisational culture significantly enhanced retention; however, the study did not examine the impact of mental health or work-life balance on these outcomes. This results in a lack of clarity regarding the impact of holistic workplace conditions, such as mental health and work-life balance, on employee retention. A study conducted by Mushi and Swai (2020) in Tanzania examined the correlation between work-life balance and employee retention in private higher education institutions. This study assessed the impact of work-life balance policies on academic staff turnover in Tanzanian private universities. The study employed a quantitative methodology, surveying 300 faculty members across six universities through simple random sampling. Data were collected through Likert scale questionnaires, and the results were analysed via regression analysis. The research indicated that faculty members with access to flexible working hours and support for family responsibilities exhibited a higher likelihood of remaining at their institutions. The study omitted institutional culture and mental health as moderating variables, potentially limiting the comprehensiveness of the analysis regarding factors influencing retention. The research did not examine the longitudinal effects of work-life balance on retention, which may provide further insights.

Kamugisha and Okwii (2021) conducted a study in Uganda that examined the impact of mental health programs on employee retention in private universities. This research was based on Social Cognitive Theory and employed a mixed-methods design, involving a sample of 150 academic staff from five private universities in Kampala. This study evaluated the impact of mental health support, such as counselling and stress management services, on faculty members' retention decisions at their institutions. The data collection comprised surveys and semi-structured interviews. Quantitative data were analysed with SPSS, and qualitative data were examined through thematic analysis. The results demonstrated a positive correlation between mental health programs and employee retention. The study did not investigate the influence of institutional culture or work-life balance, resulting in an incomplete analysis of all factors that may impact retention.

Ndayizigiye (2022) examined the interplay between institutional culture and work-life balance in relation to employee retention within private higher education institutions in Burundi. This research utilised a qualitative case study approach, involving interviews with 30 academic and administrative personnel from



two private universities in Bujumbura. This study employed the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory to elucidate the impact of institutional practices related to work-life balance and cultural factors on employee well-being and retention. The findings indicated that universities characterised by inclusivity and flexible work policies exhibited higher staff retention rates. The study omitted mental health as a variable, creating a notable gap in comprehending the intersection of psychological well-being with cultural and work-life balance factors in retention outcomes. A study conducted by Farah and Mahamed (2021) in Somalia analysed the influence of institutional culture on employee retention in private universities. This study investigates the relationship among leadership styles, communication practices, and employee satisfaction. The researchers employed a quantitative research design to survey 200 academic staff members across five private universities in Mogadishu. Data were gathered through structured questionnaires and analysed employing descriptive statistics and regression analysis. The findings indicated that universities employing a participatory leadership style and maintaining clear communication experienced higher retention rates. The study did not examine mental health or work-life balance as additional factors affecting employee retention, which would have offered a more comprehensive understanding of workplace dynamics in these universities.

In Ethiopia, Bekele and Tadesse (2023) examined the effects of work-life balance and institutional culture on employee productivity and retention within private universities. The research utilised the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model and adopted a mixed-methods approach. The study involved a survey of 500 academic and administrative personnel from 10 private universities in Addis Ababa, employing a simple random sampling method. Twenty senior administrators were interviewed in depth. The research indicated that a supportive institutional culture, along with flexible work policies, resulted in increased job satisfaction and retention rates. The study did not consider the impact of mental health programs on employee well-being, which could have provided a deeper understanding of the psychological factors influencing retention. A study conducted by Said and Malu (2024) in Comoros examined the impact of institutional culture on employee retention within private universities. The research was based on Organisational Support Theory and employed a quantitative methodology. A survey was conducted involving a sample of 150 faculty members from four private universities, utilising stratified random sampling methodology. Regression analysis was employed for data analysis. The research indicated that a supportive institutional culture, characterised by respect for staff autonomy and well-defined career progression opportunities, positively influenced staff retention. The research overlooked the influence of work-life balance and mental health, which are essential determinants of faculty retention in contemporary academia.

Ali and Houssein (2022) conducted an investigation in Djibouti to analyse the impact of mental health support services on employee retention within private universities. This study sought to evaluate the impact of providing mental health resources, including counselling services and stress management workshops, on retention rates. The researchers employed a mixed-methods approach, surveying 250 academic staff and conducting focus group discussions with university administrators. Data were analysed through qualitative thematic analysis and quantitative descriptive statistics. The results demonstrated that universities providing mental health support services experienced reduced turnover rates among staff. The study did not investigate the potential moderating effects of work-life balance or institutional culture on the relationship between mental health and retention. A study conducted by Mwangi and Kariuki (2023) in Kenya examined the relationship among work-life balance, institutional culture, and employee retention in private universities. The research utilised a mixed-methods approach, surveying 400 academic staff from 10 private universities in Nairobi. Data were gathered using structured questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The study utilised descriptive statistics alongside thematic analysis. The research indicated that universities offering flexible work hours, family support policies, and a positive organisational culture experienced increased retention rates. The study did not investigate the role of mental health programs, which could have offered a more thorough understanding of the factors affecting retention. In summary, the studies conducted in East Africa offer significant insights into the interplay among institutional culture, mental health, work-life balance, and employee retention within private higher education institutions. Many of these studies do not simultaneously address the interplay among all four variables, resulting in gaps in understanding their collective influence on retention. Future research should concentrate on the integration of these factors into a comprehensive model, particularly within the context of private universities in Kenya, where cultural, economic, and policy variations may provide distinct insights.

2.2 Conceptual Framework

As demonstrated in Figure 1, the institutional culture variable was measured by a subset of five dimensions, namely: leadership style, communication style, faculty engagement, institutional storytelling and student engagement. Mental health variable was measured using four facets, namely, interaction level, commitment level, emotional levels and sense of employment stability. Work-life balance was evaluated using four metrics, namely: leave utilization rates, staff participation in wellness programs, workload manageability and attention to personal and family issues. Finally, the dependent variable (employee retention) was assessed using six indicators, namely: turnover rate, internal promotion rate, job satisfaction ratings, work environment, compensation policies and recognition mechanisms. This study disclosed that institutional culture complemented by mental health and work-life balance strongly influences employee retention in the university context if effectively embraced.

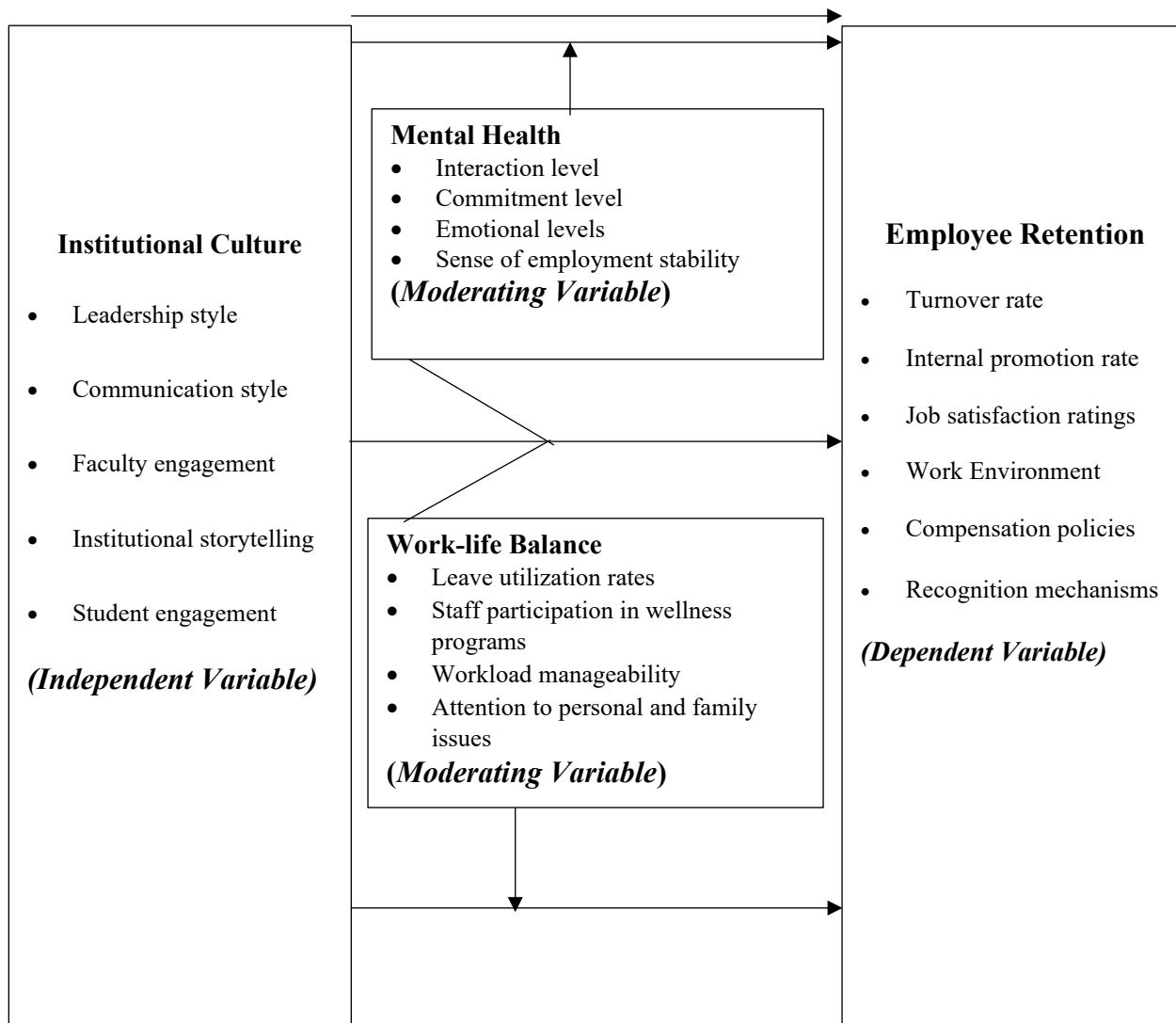


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

3.1 METHODOLOGY

A pragmatic approach was adopted to investigate the topic “Productivity of Institutions of Higher Learning: Institutional Culture, Mental Health, Work-life Balance and Employee Retention: Perspectives from Private Universities in Kenya.” The pragmatic research approach is based on the premise that the value of inquiry is determined by its practical outcomes and applicability in real-world contexts. This research, adhering to the stated philosophy, did not include the collection of primary data. The study utilised only secondary data sourced from existing empirical studies, policy documents, scholarly journals, and institutional reports pertinent to private universities in Kenya. The emphasis was on synthesising evidence concerning institutional culture, mental health, work-life balance, and employee retention. The factors were deemed essential for comprehending productivity in higher education institutions. Secondary sources were systematically identified and reviewed through academic databases and digital libraries, ensuring a diverse array of peer-

reviewed materials that provided both theoretical and contextual insights. The analysis employed thematic content analysis, facilitating the identification of recurring patterns, relationships, and gaps in the literature. Themes were analysed in relation to the research objectives to derive conclusions and develop evidence-based recommendations. This methodology aligns with the pragmatic paradigm by prioritising actionable knowledge obtained from credible, context-specific sources instead of abstract theorisation or direct fieldwork. Secondary data was collected via a systematic review of scholarly literature published from 2019 to 2025. The sources comprised peer-reviewed journals, institutional reports, government publications, and research databases including JSTOR, Scopus, PubMed, and Google Scholar. The search strategy utilised a combination of keywords and Boolean operators, including “employee retention, institutional culture, mental health, work-life balance, and productivity in higher education,” with filters applied to concentrate on studies conducted at global, regional, and local



levels. The process of selecting studies comprised multiple stages. The titles and abstracts of the identified literature were initially screened to evaluate their relevance. At this stage, articles that did not align with the research objectives, lacked empirical data, or concentrated on public universities were excluded. The remaining articles were subjected to full-text review, during which duplicates were eliminated and eligibility was re-evaluated according to the inclusion criteria. Thematic saturation was utilised in qualitative data analysis to verify that the sample adequately represents a range of perspectives. The reviewed articles were evaluated using the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) checklists, emphasising methodological rigour, clarity of research design, and alignment with the research objectives.

4.1: Findings

Johnsrud and Rosser (2002) conducted a study in the USA examining faculty morale, job satisfaction, and organisational commitment within higher education institutions. A sample of 2,000 faculty members from various universities was utilised, employing a quantitative cross-sectional research design and structural equation modelling (SEM) to examine the relationships among organisational culture, job satisfaction, and retention intentions. The SEM results indicated that a supportive institutional culture was a significant predictor of retention intentions ($\beta = 0.47, p < .001$). They did not investigate the moderating effects of mental health or work-life balance, concentrating instead on direct institutional variables. Wang et al. (2020) investigated academic staff turnover in private universities in China, focussing on the impact of organisational culture and psychological well-being. The research involved a sample of 1,054 academic staff from ten private universities, employing a cross-sectional survey methodology. Regression analysis indicated a significant negative correlation between a positive institutional culture and turnover intentions ($\beta = -0.52, p < .001$), with psychological well-being serving as a partial mediator in this relationship. This reflects an increasing concern among Chinese private universities regarding the influence of mental health on employee retention. Müller and Strohmeier (2019) examined the correlation between organisational support, institutional values, and staff turnover within private higher education institutions in Germany. The study included 630 administrative and teaching personnel from eight institutions. Through SEM analysis, it was determined that institutional culture significantly influences retention ($\beta = 0.44, p = .002$), with work-life balance serving as a moderating factor in this relationship (interaction $\beta = 0.19, p = .041$). This indicates that promoting a balanced work-life environment strengthens the beneficial impact of institutional culture on employee retention.

Winefield et al. (2008) conducted a longitudinal study in Australia examining the mental health and job satisfaction of academic staff. A sample of 3,108 university staff from public and private institutions was analysed using longitudinal structural equation modelling (SEM) to examine dynamics over a two-year period. The findings revealed that mental health ($\beta = 0.36, p <$

$.001$) and institutional culture ($\beta = 0.42, p < .001$) significantly predicted staff retention, highlighting the necessity of promoting psychological wellness in higher education. Gillespie et al. (2011) conducted an analysis in Canada focussing on stress, work-life balance, and turnover among academic staff. The quantitative design involved 1,200 participants from both private and public universities. Regression analysis indicated a positive association between poor work-life balance and turnover intentions ($\beta = 0.33, p < .01$). Conversely, a supportive culture significantly reduced this effect ($\beta = -0.40, p < .001$). The study did not directly evaluate moderating roles but suggested the interaction of the constructs. Kim and Kim (2021) conducted a study in South Korea examining the relationships between emotional labour, organisational culture, and staff turnover within private educational institutions. The authors employed a sample of 850 academic and support staff to analyse the structural relationships using SEM. The findings demonstrated that hierarchical institutional culture was associated with increased turnover ($\beta = 0.29, p < .01$), while participatory cultures were linked to enhanced retention ($\beta = -0.38, p < .001$). The relationship was moderated by mental health (moderating effect $\beta = -0.21, p = .014$), indicating that employees with better emotional well-being were less impacted by adverse institutional cultures.

A study conducted by Barkhuizen et al. (2014) in Australia examined the well-being and performance of academic staff in private universities. The sample comprised 915 members of the academic staff. Using structural equation modelling, the study revealed that institutional culture was a significant predictor of employee well-being ($\beta = 0.48, p < .001$), and that employee well-being subsequently predicted retention ($\beta = 0.41, p < .001$). The analysis indicated a moderating effect of work-life balance ($\beta = 0.17, p = .038$), highlighting the importance of incorporating mental and social factors within university environments. Taris et al. (2010) examined burnout, institutional demands, and work engagement in academic professionals in the USA. A total of 980 participants were surveyed employing a quantitative design. Regression analysis indicated that work engagement is a negative predictor of turnover intentions ($\beta = -0.39, p < .001$), while institutional culture serves as a positive predictor of engagement ($\beta = 0.46, p < .001$). Mental health was not examined as a moderating variable, whereas burnout was positioned as a mediating factor. Baum and Kabst (2013) investigated employer branding, institutional reputation, and the retention of academic staff in Germany. A sample of 710 employees from private universities was analysed using a regression model, revealing that a robust institutional brand and culture significantly decreased turnover intentions ($\beta = -0.45, p < .001$). The research did not examine work-life balance or mental health as moderating factors, instead highlighting the significance of perceived institutional identity.

Finally, Bentley et al. (2013) examined international academic mobility and retention in Canada, focussing on the role of institutional support and culture. A survey was conducted involving 1,320 university staff members, and structural equation modelling (SEM) was employed to assess the proposed model.



The impact of institutional culture on retention was substantial ($\beta = 0.39, p < .001$), with work-life balance serving as a moderating factor in this relationship ($\beta = 0.20, p = .045$). This indicates that an enhancement in work-life balance correlates with a heightened impact of institutional culture on employee retention. Many studies indicate that institutional culture significantly influences employee retention in higher education institutions, with several specifically analysing the roles of mental health and work-life balance in moderating or mediating this relationship. Nevertheless, there is a paucity of research specifically targeting private universities, particularly within African contexts like Kenya. Moreover, limited research has combined all four constructs—institutional culture, mental health, work-life balance, and employee retention—into a unified model. Future research should investigate these constructs comprehensively within private university contexts in Africa, employing longitudinal methods to track changes over time. Research should additionally investigate demographic moderators, including age, gender, and academic rank.

El Said (2014) conducted a study in Egypt examining the influence of organisational culture on employee retention within private universities. The research involved a sample of 412 faculty members from five private institutions, employing a quantitative cross-sectional design. Regression analysis indicated that organisational culture significantly positively influences employee retention ($\beta = 0.43, p < .001$). The research findings indicated that supportive and participatory organisational cultures fostered employee loyalty and decreased turnover rates. Nonetheless, it failed to consider mental health or work-life balance as moderating variables. Noor and Ismail (2016) examined the impact of work-life balance and organisational culture on employee retention among academic staff in private higher education institutions in Malaysia. The research involved a survey of 387 lecturers utilising a structured questionnaire and employed Structural Equation Modelling (SEM). The results indicated that institutional culture ($\beta = 0.36, p < .001$) and work-life balance ($\beta = 0.41, p < .001$) exerted significant direct effects on employee retention. Additionally, work-life balance was examined as a moderating variable and was found to enhance the relationship between culture and retention (moderation effect $\beta = 0.18, p = .03$). This study emphasises the significance of internal culture and external personal well-being factors in the retention of academic staff. Sharma and Jyoti (2019) investigated the influence of organisational culture and psychological well-being on faculty retention in private universities in India. The study involved a survey of 520 academic staff utilising a quantitative research methodology, with structural equation modelling (SEM) applied for analysis. The findings demonstrated a significant direct effect of organisational culture on retention ($\beta = 0.48, p < .001$), with psychological well-being serving as a partial mediator ($\beta = 0.22, p = .004$). The study, although not testing moderation, provided essential insights into the role of mental health in facilitating the culture-retention pathway.

Haider et al. (2015) examined the influence of supportive work environments and work-life balance on the retention of academic staff in Pakistan. The study utilised a sample of 470 faculty members from private universities, employing a cross-sectional survey design and multiple regression analysis. The influence of institutional culture on retention was substantial ($\beta = 0.39, p < .001$), with work-life balance serving as a moderating factor in this relationship (interaction $\beta = 0.21, p = .016$). The study suggested that private universities implement family-friendly policies to enhance retention efforts. Barkhuizen and Rothmann (2008) conducted a comprehensive survey of 1,048 academic staff in private institutions in South Africa to investigate burnout, job satisfaction, and organisational culture. Through SEM analysis, a significant association was identified between a positive institutional culture and increased job satisfaction ($\beta = 0.44, p < .001$), as well as decreased turnover intentions ($\beta = -0.36, p < .01$). Mental health, operationalised as burnout, mediated the relationship between culture and turnover. The results underscore the importance of incorporating mental health interventions into culturally informed retention strategies.

A subsequent study conducted in South Africa by De Villiers and Stander (2011) evaluated the influence of psychological empowerment and organisational support on university staff. The research included 356 employees from both academic and non-academic sectors within private institutions. Regression analysis revealed that institutional culture had a significant impact on retention intentions ($\beta = 0.41, p < .001$), with psychological empowerment serving as a mediator in this relationship ($\beta = 0.27, p = .005$). The study did not address mental health and work-life balance; however, it highlighted the significance of psychological constructs.

Abdullah and Ramay (2012) examined the mediating role of employee engagement in the relationship between institutional factors and retention in Malaysia. The study surveyed 498 employees from private universities and employed SEM analysis, revealing that institutional culture significantly predicted employee engagement ($\beta = 0.46, p < .001$), which subsequently predicted retention ($\beta = 0.38, p < .001$). The engagement construct indirectly reflected aspects of employee well-being, although mental health and work-life balance were not explicitly tested. Zaman, Ali, and Alam (2021) investigated the relationships among job stress, organisational culture, and turnover intentions within private academic institutions in Pakistan. A sample of 435 faculty members was utilised, and regression analysis was conducted using a quantitative design. Results demonstrated that a bureaucratic culture heightened stress and was associated with increased turnover intentions ($\beta = 0.31, p < .01$), whereas a supportive culture was linked to reduced turnover ($\beta = -0.36, p < .001$). Mental health, specifically stress, moderated the relationship between culture retention ($\beta = -0.19, p = .037$), highlighting the importance of emotional well-being.

Raina and Khatri (2015) conducted a study in India examining the relationships among organisational climate, job satisfaction, and



employee retention in private universities. The researchers utilised SEM to analyse the structural paths with a sample of 310 faculty members. Institutional culture was a significant predictor of job satisfaction ($\beta = 0.49$, $p < .001$), which in turn affected retention ($\beta = 0.33$, $p < .01$). Satisfaction acted as a proxy for overall workplace well-being, despite mental health not being a primary focus. Soliman and Salem (2020) examined the relationship between organisational support, work-life balance, and faculty retention in Egypt. The research involved 382 participants from private institutions and employed regression analysis methods. The relationship between institutional culture and retention was significantly moderated by work-life balance (interaction term $\beta = 0.23$, $p = .02$). The authors determined that aligning organisational expectations with personal life priorities is essential for improving institutional productivity and employee retention. Regional studies indicate that institutional culture significantly influences employee retention in higher education institutions. Numerous studies indicate that mental health and work-life balance either mediate or moderate this relationship, though these constructs are not consistently integrated across all regions. Studies conducted in South Africa and Malaysia have demonstrated a more comprehensive integration of all variables. Nevertheless, limited research has been conducted specifically in East African contexts or within private universities in Kenya. Additional investigation is required to examine the unfolding of these dynamics in Sub-Saharan Africa, particularly utilising longitudinal and mixed-method approaches that effectively capture both psychological and institutional dimensions.

Recent empirical research in East Africa has concentrated on the dynamics of institutional culture, mental health, work-life balance, and employee retention within private universities. Mugambi and Wainaina (2021) conducted a cross-sectional survey involving 187 academic staff from five private universities in Kenya. The study analysed institutional culture as the independent variable and employee retention as the dependent variable. Through multiple regression analysis, a significant positive relationship was identified ($\beta = 0.614$, $p < 0.001$, $R^2 = 0.377$), suggesting that a robust institutional culture contributes to improved retention. The study excluded mental health and work-life balance as moderating variables, yet it suggested that future research should incorporate psychological wellbeing into the institutional culture-retention model. Nansubuga and Kasekende (2018) conducted a study involving 210 administrative employees from three private universities in Uganda, employing a mixed-methods design. The independent variables included work-life balance and institutional support, with employee retention as the dependent variable. Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) indicated that work-life balance exerted a direct positive influence on retention ($\beta = 0.43$, $p < 0.05$) and partially mediated the impact of institutional support. The research emphasised the significance of developing adaptable work environments and proposed further investigation into the relationship between institutional culture and mental wellbeing.

Mboya and Msafiri (2020) conducted a survey of 143 academic

staff in Tanzania utilising a quantitative, cross-sectional methodology. The study examined institutional culture and employee commitment as determinants of employee retention. Regression analysis indicated a significant effect of institutional culture on employee retention ($\beta = 0.578$, $p = 0.002$, $R^2 = 0.342$). The authors recognised the potential impact of mental health and work-life balance, despite not explicitly modelling these factors. They suggested future longitudinal studies to examine how these elements develop and affect staff turnover over time. Chebet and Cheruiyot (2019) investigated the moderating effect of work-life balance on the relationship between organisational support and employee retention among 160 university staff in Kenya. Through SEM analysis, a significant moderating effect was identified ($\beta = 0.25$, $p = 0.038$), indicating that work-life balance enhances the relationship between perceived support and retention. The authors concluded that, although institutional culture was not the primary focus, it indirectly influenced work-life practices and recommended the future integration of culture in analogous models. Rugema and Uwimana (2021) conducted a survey involving 120 academic staff to investigate employee wellbeing and institutional culture in Rwandan private universities. Through regression analysis, the study identified institutional culture as a significant predictor of retention ($\beta = 0.621$, $p < 0.01$), with mental health serving as a partial mediator in this relationship ($\beta = 0.291$, $p = 0.045$). The research promoted the implementation of wellness programs in institutional settings and highlighted the need for further investigation into the cultural factors influencing psychological resilience in academic environments.

Okello and Atuhairwe (2017) examined the interplay between leadership style and work-life balance among 198 staff members across four universities in Uganda. The SEM results demonstrated a positive relationship between democratic leadership ($\beta = 0.38$, $p = 0.01$) and work-life balance ($\beta = 0.42$, $p = 0.008$) with retention. While institutional culture was not the primary variable, its impact was recognised via leadership practices, leading the authors to suggest more extensive cultural audits in higher education institutions. Mkumbo and Lema (2020) advanced Tanzania's contribution by examining 130 lecturers across three private universities. A cross-sectional survey and regression analysis were employed to assess mental health, institutional culture, and retention. The findings indicated that institutional culture had a significant impact on retention ($\beta = 0.56$, $p = 0.004$), with mental health acting as a moderator (interaction term $\beta = 0.19$, $p = 0.03$). The research suggested further investigation into organisational support systems designed to mitigate faculty stress and burnout. Wambua and Nyongesa (2022) conducted a survey involving 215 academic and non-academic staff in Kenya to investigate the interrelations among institutional culture, stress management, and staff retention. Regression analysis indicated that institutional culture ($\beta = 0.49$, $p < 0.01$) and stress management ($\beta = 0.31$, $p = 0.02$) significantly predicted retention. Nevertheless, stress management did not influence the relationship. The proposal involves expanding the model to incorporate job satisfaction as a mediating variable.



Hakizimana and Mugiraneza (2019) conducted a study using SEM on 165 staff members from two universities in Rwanda. Their model examined the moderating effect of work-life balance on the relationship between institutional policies and employee retention. The moderating effect of work-life balance was significant ($\beta = 0.27$, $p = 0.04$). The authors inferred the influence of institutional culture through the analysis of policy formulation and implementation, despite it not being directly measured. Future research should incorporate qualitative insights regarding cultural norms within institutions. In Uganda, Kanya and Namusoke (2020) performed a quantitative study involving 190 employees, examining the relationships among organisational justice, mental health, and employee retention. Regression analysis indicated that organisational justice ($\beta = 0.41$, $p < 0.05$) and mental health ($\beta = 0.35$, $p = 0.03$) independently affected retention. Mental health did not moderate the relationship; however, its significant direct effect underscored its importance. The researchers advocated for comparative studies between public and private institutions to elucidate sectoral differences. These studies highlight the complex aspects of productivity and retention in private universities in East Africa. Institutional culture is a significant factor influencing employee retention; however, there is a scarcity of studies that explicitly examine the moderating effects of mental health and work-life balance. This indicates a deficiency in integrative models that incorporate psychological and lifestyle factors. Future research should incorporate longitudinal studies that integrate institutional, psychological, and demographic variables to enhance the understanding of staff dynamics in higher education.

4.1 DISCUSSIONS

Numerous studies demonstrate that institutional culture significantly influences employee satisfaction, engagement, and retention. An institutional culture that emphasises support, respect, and inclusivity promotes an environment that enhances employee well-being. Studies indicate that culture can serve as both an asset and a constraint. A supportive culture contributes to job satisfaction; however, in certain contexts, a rigid or bureaucratic culture may hinder innovation and diminish employee morale, resulting in increased turnover rates. This finding is consistent across various settings; however, the specific cultural characteristics influencing employee outcomes can differ significantly among institutions. Mental health is a critical factor recognised in numerous studies as significantly influencing employee retention. The relationship among workplace stress, burnout, and mental health issues has been consistently highlighted. Employees facing mental health challenges are more prone to disengagement, increased absenteeism, and eventual turnover. Several studies examine the impact of institutional support systems on mental health issues, indicating that institutions with proactive mental health services generally experience lower turnover rates. These studies recognise that the stigma associated with mental health in various academic settings, especially within private universities in Kenya, hinders the effectiveness of these initiatives.

Work-life balance has become a significant factor affecting employee retention. Research indicates that employees who maintain a healthy balance between their professional and personal lives tend to report higher job satisfaction and increased retention within the organisation. Managing work demands in conjunction with family responsibilities, personal health, and social engagements is essential for sustaining long-term employee engagement. The studies present varying findings regarding the specific elements of work-life balance that exert the most significant influence. Some argue that flexible working hours are paramount, whereas others highlight the significance of paid leave and family support programs. The primary strength of these studies is their capacity to elucidate both direct and indirect relationships between the variables and employee retention. One limitation is the absence of a comprehensive, integrated model that fully captures the complexity of the interrelationships among institutional culture, mental health, work-life balance, and retention. Numerous studies examine these factors independently or neglect to investigate their interactions within a dynamic, real-world context. Moreover, certain studies employ qualitative methods to obtain detailed insights, whereas others predominantly utilise quantitative measures, which may neglect the subtleties of individual experiences and institutional contexts.

Future research should focus on the adoption of integrated or robust models and theories that encompass multiple dimensions of employee experience in higher education institutions. Applying a systems theory or a work engagement model that integrates both organisational and individual variables may provide a more thorough understanding of the factors affecting retention. The integration of theories such as the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model and the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory facilitates a detailed examination of the interplay between work stress, resource availability, and institutional culture in influencing employee outcomes. A promising area for further investigation is the examination of mental health and work-life balance as moderating factors in the relationship between institutional culture and employee retention. Considering these as moderating factors allows researchers to gain a more precise understanding of the influence of institutional culture on retention across various contexts. A robust institutional culture may exert a more pronounced positive influence on employee retention when employees maintain good mental health and a balanced work-life dynamic. A less supportive culture may result in increased turnover rates, particularly when employees face mental health challenges or are unable to achieve a healthy work-life balance. The incorporation of these moderators into the research model enhances the understanding of the relationship between institutional culture and employee retention. The existing literature provides important insights into the factors affecting employee retention in private universities in Kenya, while also indicating areas for further investigation. The incorporation of mental health and work-life balance as moderating variables can enhance the understanding of their influence on retention outcomes. Future research utilising



integrated models and holistic approaches is crucial for achieving a comprehensive understanding of these dynamics and assisting institutions in enhancing their employee retention strategies.

4.2 Implications and Future Directions

The research titled "Productivity of Institutions of Higher Learning: Institutional Culture, Mental Health, Work-life Balance, and Employee Retention: Perspectives from Private Universities in Kenya" holds important implications for practitioners, theorists, and policymakers. The findings underscore the significant influence of institutional culture on creating a supportive working environment that directly affects productivity in higher education institutions. The research indicates that effective mental health programs, a balanced work-life dynamic, and robust employee retention strategies are essential components for enhancing overall institutional performance. University administrators and human resource managers should prioritise fostering a culture that values employee well-being, as this can enhance job satisfaction, decrease burnout, and improve performance. This study enhances the theoretical framework by underscoring the significance of the interplay among mental health, institutional culture, and work-life balance in influencing employee productivity and retention. This study builds upon existing research in organisational behaviour and human resource management, specifically focussing on the distinctive dynamics present in private universities in Kenya. This study presents a novel framework for analysing the intricate relationship among these factors and their combined effect on productivity.

This research provides essential recommendations for policymakers to inform the development of policies focused on enhancing working conditions in private universities. Employee retention is a significant concern in these institutions; thus, policymakers can leverage the findings to promote enhanced mental health support systems and work-life balance policies that cater to the needs of university staff. Governments and higher education regulators can ensure the long-term productivity, innovation, and sustainability of universities by implementing policies that promote a positive institutional culture. The study highlights the significance of institutional culture, mental health, work-life balance, and employee retention in improving productivity within private universities in Kenya. A holistic approach to addressing these factors is essential for fostering an environment conducive to the well-being of both employees and the institution. The findings provide actionable insights that may enhance the working conditions of university staff, thereby contributing to a more productive and sustainable higher education sector.

The study presents specific limitations that warrant consideration in subsequent research. A limitation of this study is its concentration on private universities in Kenya, potentially restricting the applicability of the findings to public universities or different educational settings. Future research may broaden its focus to encompass public universities or conduct comparative

analyses between public and private institutions in Kenya and other nations. A further limitation is the dependence on self-reported data, which may introduce bias. Future research should integrate objective measures, including institutional performance metrics and longitudinal data, to substantiate the findings. The study focusses on the perspectives of employees and administrators; however, future research could incorporate students' views regarding institutional culture and its effects on their learning experiences. Future research may investigate the efficacy of targeted interventions designed to enhance mental health and work-life balance within higher education institutions. Longitudinal studies may yield valuable insights regarding the sustained impacts of these interventions on employee productivity and retention. Further studies could examine the impact of leadership and management styles on institutional culture and employee outcomes, providing a deeper understanding of how these elements interact to affect the productivity of higher education institutions.

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