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# THE EMPLOYEE RETENTION PRACTICES OF THE PROVINCIAL UNIVERSITIES IN THE NORTHERN MIDLAND AND MOUNTAINOUS REGION OF VIETNAM

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## ABSTRACT

The article analysed the employee retention practices of the provincial universities. The ANOVA technique was used to test for significant difference between managers, administrative staff, and lecturers in terms of growth opportunities, compensations, supports, relationships, culture and work environment. Based on the research results, the researcher will propose enhanced policies for the retention practices of provincial universities.

**Keywords:** *Northern midland and mountainous region of Vietnam, Provincial university, retention practice.*

## 1. Introduction

Recruitment is the input of the human resources management process and it affects the quality of human resources in organizations. However, after recruiting, retaining the employees is also very difficult. Organizational problems such as training time and investment, losing knowledge and looking for the candidates, and failing to retain a key employee, are all costly. Various assessments suggest that losing a middle manager costs an organization up to 100 percent of his salary. The loss of a senior executive is even more costly. A recent study shows that 85% of human resource executives said that the greatest challenge in managing

the workforce is their organization has the inability to recruit and retain good employees and managers (Greg Smith, 2008). Employers tend to face major challenges when they are aware of the increasing difficulty of finding skilled people, a younger workforce with different attitudes about work, and a growing population of older workers heading toward retirement. Therefore, employee retention, especially the key employees is an important challenge in organizations today.

Since 1997, in order to meet the demands of human resources for the localities, the universities under the management of the provincial authorities were established. In the process of formation and development,

besides the advantages, the provincial universities are facing many challenges, especially in how to keep high-quality employees to work permanently. However, located in the northern midland and mountainous region, where most of the provinces are still the poor provinces with socioeconomic conditions are very difficult; the living standard of local people is still low; the investment in education is limited. The provincial universities had to compete with elder universities such as the national universities, regional universities, and the universities under the management of the ministries in attracting and keeping high - quality employees, and solve the “brain - drain” situation.

In fact, the universities have created advantage conditions to motivate employees for higher educational training such as master's and doctorate degrees in Vietnam and abroad. However, it seemed that the effort to keep them working in the universities to serve as the stable workforce is not quite effective. Now, the provincial universities are facing the situation of “brain - drain”. Such as: more than ten years (from 2008 to 2018), each year Hung Vuong University appoints an average of 6 - 10 people to take doctorate degree courses and 10 - 15 people to take master's degree courses. However, most of them want to move to another organization after graduating for various reasons. According to an annual summary report from the Human Resource Department in the 3 years (since 2015 to 2018), Hung Vuong University has more than 25 people, who transfers to other organization, in which 7 have doctorate degree, 15 have master's degree and 4 with bachelors degree (in which, in 2014, there were 1 with doctorate degree, 4 with master's degree; in 2015, there were 3 with doctorate

degree, 5 with master's degree and 1 with bachelor's degree; and in 2016 there were, 3 with doctorate degree, 6 with master's degree and 3 with bachelor's degree)[3]. Another learning institution, Tan Trao University experienced the loss of 12 employees (3 with doctorate degree and 9 with master' degrees) [4]. Hence, how to keep the talents to work permanently and serve as a stable workforce in universities is a vital problem for them.

The article analyzed the employees' retention practices of the provincial universities in the northern midland and mountainous region of Vietnam in terms of growth opportunities, compensations, supports, relationships, culture and work environment. Thereby, the major difficulties of the existing retention practices of the provincial universities are indicated and the policies enhancing retention practices of the provincial universities proposed.

## 2. Research methodology

The descriptive method was used through the survey of the respondents including managers, administrative staff and lecturers. The study used a combination of questionnaires and interviews in acquiring information from 390 respondents from Hung Vuong University and Tan Trao University to gather the data. The measuring instruments utilized in this research were the frequency, percentage distribution, the weighted means, regression and the one - way Anova. And the researcher adopted the rating scale below and its qualitative interpretation for the questionnaire that was used in the survey to describe the quality of the existing practices of the provincial universities.

Scale	Range Interval	Description	Verbal Interpretation
5	4.20 – 5.00	Strongly Agree (SA)	Excellent
4	3.40 – 4.19	Moderately Agree (MA)	Good
3	2.60 – 3.39	Neither Agree nor Disagree (NA)	Average
2	1.80 – 2.59	Moderately Disagree (MD)	Poor
1	1.00– 1.79	Strongly Disagree (SD)	Very poor

### 3. Results of the research

Based on the data presented, analyzed, and interpreted, the following findings were obtained:

There were 390 respondents including managers, administrative staff, and lecturers. Among the respondents, most of all were the lecturers (250 lecturers) and 58 managers were the leaders of departments and units in the universities and 82 staffs. Almost 61% of the sampled respondents were aged from 30 years to under 50 years old, 29,5% were aged under 30 years old, and only about 9,5% were aged 50 years old and above.

Approximately 58,7% of the respondents were women which composed the majority, while male respondents accounted for only 41,3%. 28.9% of the respondents were bachelors, 54.9% reached master degree, and only 16.2% reached doctoral degree. The majority of the respondents had more than 5 years of working experience with 73,6%, while there were 26,4% having working experience under 5 years.

The provincial universities have paid particular attention to motivating their employees. The universities have built and invested in training and development of human resources, enabling employees to improve their professional and technical skills to meet their work requirements. They have also established

and maintained a salary policy, as well as bonus policies to carry out the emulation and reward practice to create promotional opportunities for the universities' staff and lecturers. In addition, the good physical condition and the friendly and unified cultural environment were the reasons for universities' employees to love their job.

The existing employee retention practices of provincial universities were rated "good" by managers in most of the specific areas of growth opportunities, compensation, supports, relationships, as well as culture and work environment. The employees had opportunities to attend educational seminars and advanced courses and had been coached by a supervisor or an external expert. The universities designed and implemented the learning process to help employees to improve necessary skills to achieve universities' strategic goals. Monthly salary and bonus commensurate with jobs and salary and bonus represented the professional skills and experience of employees. The universities provided extra compensation for difficult and time-consuming duties. They established effective communication systems, in which the employees were satisfied with the physical working conditions of the universities, which were given an "average" rating. Overall, all the indicators of provincial universities' existing employee retention practices got a "good" rating from the managers.

**TABLE 1: Mean Distribution of Respondents' Perception on the Retention practices**

Factors (Variables)	Managers		Staffs		Lecturers	
	Mean	Quantitative Interpretation	Mean	Quantitative Interpretation	Mean	Quantitative Interpretation
1. Growth opportunities	3.60	Good	3.40	Average	3.32	Average
2. Compensation	3.58	Good	3.33	Average	3.37	Average
3. Supports	3.52	Good	3.32	Average	3.32	Average
4. Relationships	3.59	Good	3.36	Average	3.38	Average
5. Culture and Work environment	3.53	Good	3.43	Good	3.41	Good
GRAND MEAN	3.57	Good	3.37	Average	3.36	Average

The staff and lectures also gave the “average” rating to most of the items related to growth opportunities, compensation, and support. Although most staffs and lecturers were satisfied with the physical working conditions of universities and considered the university as their second home. As a whole, all the indicators of employee retention practices got an “average” rating from the staff and lecturers.

Most of the respondents gave a good and average rating to all the indicators used in this study, thus, it reflected their overall rating to the universities' employee retention practices. Testing the significant difference between their perceptions revealed a computed value that was lower than 0.05, which meant that the difference was very significant.

All the respondents had seen some limitations in the existing retention practices of the provincial universities. Problems related to the ineffective training were building and development of staff and lecturers; lacking of opportunities to attend educational seminars and advanced courses, as well as coached by a supervisor, an external expert; unsatisfactory compensation policies; low monthly income; unfair bonus; lacking of specific and clearly criteria of performance evaluation; unfair

employees' performance appraisal; lacking of effective communication systems and there were still many barriers and requirements that affected their job or poor physical working conditions.

#### **4. Problem encountered on the retention practices**

The training and retraining of staffs and lecturers have been done but still did not achieve the desired results. Then, the numbers of staffs and lecturers have been attended training courses were still low and there were more lecturers with a master degree than the doctor degree. Also, the using of information technology in teaching, as well as the use of foreign languages, did not meet the requirements set. This greatly affected the training's quality of the universities, as well as the quality of its human resources.

Moreover, the universities' compensations policies have improved, but did not meet the needs of lecturers, because the compensations policies of the universities were limited by state's policies and universities' funds. Although the universities have tried to improve the lives of employees, compensation policies were not satisfactory, especially for young staffs and lecturers.

Therefore, it did not really encourage the employees to improve their level and stayed in the universities. On the other hand, the policies of attracting good lecturers were not reasonable and did not attract excellent people.

Performance evaluation criteria were general, not specific, and difficult to evaluate accurately because some criteria were qualitative. In general, the performance evaluation of universities were too old and in formal. The universities have not implemented the job performance's evaluation in a scientific and rational manner, and this has affected the annual classification of emulation and compensations policies.

Finally, the quality of the management of teaching equipment and facilities were still inadequate. The policy of stimulating the creativity of the lecturers in the job did not high; the promotion and career development opportunities for lecturers were still limited. Therefore, the leaders of the universities should create better conditions and opportunities for lecturers to develop; as well as encourage and motivate lecturers to strive to upgrade their capabilities and devote more to the universities. About working conditions, despite the attention and investment of the universities, however, for many reasons, working conditions were not guaranteed. For example, projector systems, internet, and microphones were sometimes defective because of low quality. The internal computer network of the university was still incomplete and often overloaded that causing obstruction and effect on the work environment of staff and lecturers.

## **5. Enhanced policies for retention practices of the provincial universities**

Enhance opportunities for learning, scientific research, and advancement of teachers: The lecturers should be given the opportunity to learn and to improve their level of motivation. That will not only help lecturers consolidate their knowledge, but also show that the honors and academic titles that they achieved are the confirmation of their efforts on the way to conquer knowledge and earn the respect of the society. Therefore, provincial universities should create and ensure fair and regular opportunities to attend educational seminars and advanced courses, as well as be coached by the supervisors or external experts. The universities should pay more attention to create opportunities for lecturers to improve their skills. Moreover, the universities need to adjust funding to support staff to learn a foreign language and should organize delegations of lectures to enrol in universities to gain experience in teaching and scientific research.

The universities also need to pay attention to promote the scientific research of lecturers. This is also a way to increase their motivation and challenge in their work. The universities should consider scientific research as an important indicator for evaluating and evaluating achievements of lecturers alongside their teaching outcomes. At the same time, stronger fiscal incentives are needed to motivate lecturer's scientific research. Also, universities need to issue significant reward mechanisms for lecturers who have high achievement in teaching and scientific research, bonus for those whose works were published in international



journals and had attended international seminars.

Improve retention practices through compensation: The universities need to take a number of measures to improve the lecturer's income. They can also strengthen links with other institutions, organization, and academy to create jobs for staff and improve their income. Moreover, universities should also encourage and support faculty in scientific research, so that they can earn extra income in addition to their salary.

In addition, universities should develop clear reward criteria and a fair, transparent process of reward consideration to ensure accurate assessment of the teacher's performance. When conducting commendations, there must be clear procedures, ensuring true democracy. Reward lists must be publicized. The universities should strictly implement the standardization of salary, bonus, and allowances for employees. They should pay particular attention to change the salary payment mechanism for employees and continue to improve the financial management mechanism, implement internal accounting to each subordinate unit, and take measures to use financial resources economically to ensure gradual income for employees. Aside from that, universities need to diversify the types of services and improve quality of service, example lunch services at universities. The universities' lunch service has a lot of practical significance. Besides having a good meal after working hour, the lunch helps to increase solidarity among employees.

Improve retention practices by strengthening support: Remove the unnecessary barriers in implementing

the job. Important concerns may require meetings and writing reports, but not trivial undertakings that may lead to waste of time. Instead of holding meetings, universities can inform employees by telephone and email to help them have much time to focus on professional work. Reduce the administrative management and focus on proactive and creative employees. Lastly, establish and manage communication system effectively between the departments.

Improve retention practices through relationships of leaders and colleagues: On the relationship between leaders and employees, the universities should strengthen discussions between leaders and faculty, thereby facilitating communication between employees and leaders to be more open and create motivation for employees. Then, on relationships with colleagues, work units should be organized for more specialized discussions so that employees can help each other. Enhance activities such as extracurricular activities, traveling, and volunteer activities to strengthen solidarity, and to help colleagues in their problems. Faculty and units in the university should communicate with each other in order to broaden co-operative relationships and strengthen internal solidarity.

Improve retention practices by culture and work environment: an effective working environment is a working environment in which every individual in the organization feels comfortable, exciting, and inspired. It is an environment where opportunities can be created for each individual. Thus, provincial universities need to maintain and develop a cultural environment for the universities and let the universities become "the second family" for all staff, lecturers, and students.

Strengthen the teaching facilities of the universities. It is necessary to set up standard practice rooms, upgrade computers connected to the internet, and standard loudspeakers to serve for teaching. Continue to invest in upgrading existing libraries, labs with modern facilities, and invest and equip classrooms and offices with new technology, equipment, and machine to replace out-of-date materials.

## 6. Conclusion

The analysis process also showed that the existing retention practice still needs further improvement in terms of growth opportunities, compensation, supports, relationships as well as culture and working environment. Because most of the problems that were identified concerned mainly compensation policy, supporting both the incentive physical and mental for employees, then these must be given priority by the

universities. The proposed policies are all the factors of the management which means that the key to implement the universities' retention practice successful depends on them. Management, effort and initiative must be required to efficiently put all plans and solutions into action.

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## HOẠT ĐỘNG GIỮ CHÂN NGƯỜI LAO ĐỘNG TẠI CÁC TRƯỜNG ĐẠI HỌC TRỰC THUỘC TỈNH Ở KHU VỰC TRUNG DU MIỀN NÚI PHÍA BẮC VIỆT NAM

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### TÓM TẮT

Bài viết phân tích hoạt động giữ chân người lao động của các trường đại học trực thuộc tỉnh. Bằng cách sử dụng kỹ thuật ANOVA kiểm tra sự khác biệt về nhận thức giữa người quản lý, nhân viên hành chính và giảng viên về hoạt động giữ chân người lao động trên các khía cạnh như cơ hội thăng tiến, hoạt động bù đắp, hỗ trợ, mối quan hệ, văn hóa và môi trường làm việc. Dựa trên kết quả nghiên cứu đề xuất các chính sách nâng cao hoạt động giữ chân người lao động ở các trường đại học trực thuộc tỉnh.

**Từ khóa:** Đại học trực thuộc tỉnh; Hoạt động giữ chân người lao động; Khu vực miền núi phía bắc Việt Nam.