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Exploring the factors of employee turnover intentions in private education institutions in China: a Delphi study

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ABSTRACT

Retaining a devoted and skilled workforce has become of paramount importance in China's dynamic and competitive education sector. The consequences of employee turnover bear weight, especially for institutions striving for global excellence, impacting both institutional continuity and the quality of education. This study explores the factors influencing employee turnover intention within Chinese academic institutions and prioritizes these factors based on their significance. A two-round Delphi method was employed to solicit and synthesize expert opinions through iterative rounds. Nineteen experts from private education institutions in Fuzhou, China, were selected using a combination of purposeful and snowball sampling. In the first round, experts listed the factors contributing to employee turnover intentions, which were then analyzed using thematic analysis. In the second round, the experts ranked these dimensions from most to least important. The study identifies five pivotal factors affecting turnover intentions, listed in order of importance: (1) compensation, benefits, and employee recognition; (2) career development and advancement opportunities; (3) professional growth, training, and job security; (4) leadership, management support, and organizational culture; and (5) work-life balance and work environment. This research proffers actionable recommendations to discern and counteract contributors to employee turnover. The insights furnish invaluable guidance for Chinese educational institutions, underscoring the necessity of employee contentment and laying the groundwork for a sustained and driven workforce.

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Introduction

Education and training have long been critical sectors that receive significant attention. With ongoing technological advancements, the demand for skilled talent has increased, emphasizing the importance of lifelong learning and expanding adult education (Allen et al., 2018; Gong et al., 2020; Oh & Chhinzar, 2021). In modern China, parents' unprecedented emphasis on their children's education has propelled the country's educational sector to new heights. This surge has significantly expanded the private education sector, which provides a diverse range of specialized training opportunities. Despite this expansion, the issue of employee retention within these private institutions has become more pressing. The 'China Employment Market Prosperity Report for 2022' highlighted challenges in China's employment landscape, with the private education and training industry facing high talent demand. While some employee mobility can be beneficial to organizations, excessive turnover is often detrimental, affecting institutional stability and the quality of education provided.

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Private education institutions in China face unique challenges that exacerbate turnover rates. These institutions frequently face fierce competition and high-performance expectations, which can result in significant differences in turnover intentions compared to their public counterparts (Fu et al., 2022). Public institutions may face bureaucratic constraints and limited financial incentives, but private institutions face a competitive market in which the demand for high-quality education and organizational attractiveness is especially strong (Wang & Jones, 2021).

The 2023 Zhaopin report revealed that turnover rates in sectors such as culture, sports, education, and media consistently exceed 20%, emphasizing the importance of this issue in the private education sector. The challenges are exacerbated by internal dynamics within these private institutions, where issues such as job security, compensation, and opportunities for advancement play critical roles. For example, early childhood educators in urban private settings such as Shenzhen have experienced turnover rates ranging from 12% to 14%, owing to factors such as understaffing and insufficient support (Hu & Cai, 2022).

Despite the critical nature of these challenges, there is a noticeable gap in research, particularly on employee turnover in China's private education institutions. This oversight makes it difficult to develop effective strategies that are tailored to the unique operational pressures that these organizations face (Liu et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2022). To fill this gap, our study explores the factors influencing turnover intentions among employees in China's private education institutions. By focusing solely on these private settings, we hope to provide evidence-based insights that can be used to develop effective retention strategies, illuminating the specific challenges and dynamics that shape turnover intentions in this critical sector of China's educational landscape.

Present study

This study aims to explore and understand the factors influencing turnover intentions among employees in private education institutions, with a particular focus on Fuzhou City, China. Leveraging the Delphi method, the research gathered and refined expert opinions systematically and iteratively. The core objectives include identifying the impactful factors and ranking them based on their significance.

Recognizing and addressing these turnover intentions can aid institutions in crafting strategic initiatives that enhance employee satisfaction, engagement, and retention. From a broader perspective, this research seeks to provide foundational knowledge for evidence-based retention strategies tailored to private education institutions in China. Theoretically, it delves deep into the formation process of turnover intentions in the education sector, bridging existing gaps and offering a richer analytical viewpoint. The research is driven by two main research questions:

1. Which factors significantly influence turnover intentions in private education institutions in China
2. How consistent are the rankings of these identified factors?

Several potential factors are hypothesized to play a role, such as job satisfaction, work-life balance, leadership dynamics, career opportunities, organizational culture, and compensation structures. The Delphi method's iterative process will help determine and prioritize these factors.

Fuzhou City serves as the geographic focal point of this research. As a second-tier city in China, Fuzhou boasted a population of approximately 8.6 million in 2022 and has a rich educational landscape. Within the city, there are thousands of training institutions. Notably, over 100 of these institutions specialize in foreign language education, representing about one-tenth of the total. Data will be collected in two phases from selected experts who will provide insights that reflect the city's distinct educational environment. The findings of this study aim to inform retention strategies within Fuzhou City and contribute to the wider conversation about turnover intentions in educational settings.

Literature review

The conceptualization of turnover intentions and impact on the education setting

Employee turnover has piqued academic interest for many years, dating back to important publications published in the twentieth century that provided fundamental insights. Porter and Steers (1973) started

a discussion about emotional dissonance at work, which leads to subconscious aversion, which, when combined with alluring opportunities elsewhere, can result in a desire to leave. Mobley et al. (1978) later defined turnover intention as an indicator of an employee's dissatisfaction and proclivity to seek other employment opportunities. Dalton and Todor (1979) distinguished between functional and dysfunctional turnover and highlighted their respective effects on organizational health.

The teaching profession is plagued by high turnover rates worldwide, a trend that has sparked significant academic interest (Dutta & Sahney, 2016; Virtanen & Parpala, 2023). This phenomenon highlights the significant influence of variables such as leadership styles, work environment, and salary on educators' decisions to stay or leave their positions. For example, Dutta and Sahney (2016) found that directive leadership styles contribute to higher teacher turnover rates. The work environment, which includes organizational culture, peer relationships, and access to resources, has a significant impact on teachers' experiences and, as a result, turnover intentions (Zhao, 2019). Compensation, specifically salary satisfaction, has been identified as a mediator between perceived organizational justice and turnover intentions, emphasizing its significance in the broader turnover discourse (Zhou & Ma, 2022).

The determinants of turnover intentions

Modern research has primarily measured turnover through voluntary departures, with turnover intentions as a primary variable (Kim et al., 2017). There is widespread agreement that these intentions are linked to actual departures (Aldatmaz et al., 2018; Gao et al., 2018), with Kim et al. (2017) finding that turnover intentions are stronger predictors than organizational commitment or job satisfaction. Price's (2001) model then provided a comprehensive examination of turnover determinants by bringing together disciplines such as economics and sociology. It emphasized the numerous factors that influence turnover intentions, including environmental, individual, and structural variables, with job satisfaction and organizational commitment serving as intermediary factors. Price emphasizes the importance of job search behavior in predicting turnover rates.

However, the complexities of turnover intentions are influenced by a combination of social, organizational, and individual factors (Zhang et al., 2022). While societal factors include cultural and economic conditions, organizational influences include corporate culture, compensation, and working conditions (Kim et al., 2017; Zhao, 2019). Personal variables refer to demographics such as age, gender, and family status (Emirođlu et al., 2015, 2010; Kim et al., 2017; Soomro, 2020). As research has progressed, a more interconnected approach has been taken, exploring into the mutual interaction of employees and their organizations. Salary satisfaction has been identified as a mediator between organizational justice and turnover intention (Zhou & Ma, 2022), and teaching methodologies, both student-centered and teacher-centered, have been linked to teachers' self-efficacy and interactions, which influence turnover intentions (Collie, 2022). Notably, recent global events, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, have increased work-related stress for educators, resulting in burnout and increased intentions to leave the profession (Virtanen & Parpala, 2023).

Despite extensive research on turnover intentions, further investigation into the specific manifestations and effects of these factors in China's private education context is still warranted (Chen et al., 2022; Shi et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2021). This study aims to fill this critical gap by investigating how the identified determinants of turnover intentions are specifically configured within Chinese private educational settings, as influenced by rapid policy shifts, cultural expectations, and country-specific economic changes. Our study broadens the discussion by providing a deeper comprehension of turnover across China's private educational environments. This research is especially important given the disparities between public and private institutions, which are frequently overlooked in larger studies (Shah et al., 2020). By addressing these specific factors, this study adds significantly to the existing literature by highlighting the unique challenges that private education educators in China face and providing actionable insights for policy and management practices aimed at reducing turnover and improving educational quality. Understanding employee turnover intentions requires a comprehensive lens that recognizes individual desires, organizational contexts, and broader societal influences (Allen & Vardaman, 2021). This study aims to fill a gap in current research by providing a detailed analysis of how these factors manifest

in private educational settings in China, making valuable contributions to both academic research and practical applications in educational management.

Methods

Research design

The Delphi method, a qualitative forecasting technique, was employed in a two-round research design to investigate factors impacting turnover intentions among employee in Chinese private education institutions, as showcased in [Figure 1](#). This method is predicated on integrating independent expert opinions (Mohd Noor et al., 2022) by soliciting feedback via tools like questionnaires (Olsen et al., 2021). [Figure 1](#) delineates the Delphi process, highlighting its versatility, especially in generating insights or predictions on various subjects.

The Delphi method thrives when probing topics replete with divergent or contentious views. It's an optimal choice when direct empirical data is elusive, mirroring the conditions of this study. Leveraging mixed methods research, both qualitative and quantitative data merge to offer a holistic analysis of the factors influencing turnover intentions in private education teaching staff. This synergy allows for enriched understanding—qualitative data offers depth into the background, while quantitative data establishes statistical relationships (Dawadi et al., 2021). Such a blend empowers the research, as thematic analysis from qualitative insights can be juxtaposed with quantitative correlation analyses, fostering robust validation (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

Sampling design and data collection

In this study, a combination of purposeful and snowball sampling was used to create a panel of 40 experts from private education institutions in the Fuzhou region. Purposeful sampling was used to identify key individuals with significant expertise in education management, who were chosen for their ability to contribute in-depth knowledge to the study on employee turnover intentions. To supplement this initial group and ensure a diverse range of insights, snowball sampling was used, in which the initially selected experts recommended additional colleagues from their professional networks who had relevant experience and perspectives (Subramaniam et al., 2024). The strategic use of both sampling methods effectively broadened the expert base and increased the diversity of the panel, allowing for a more comprehensive and informed analysis of the factors influencing employee turnover intentions. The experts received the questionnaire through email, ensuring they could respond within the stipulated period.

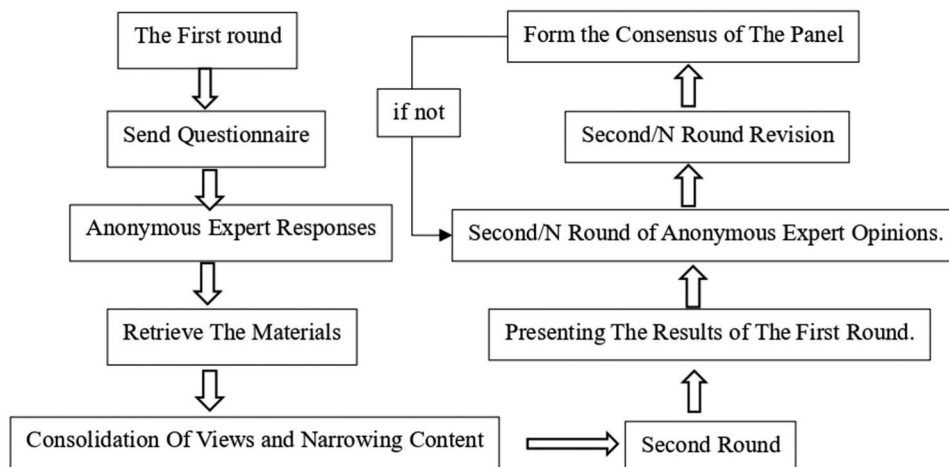


Figure 1. Flowchart of Delphi Method.

Moreover, these experts were accorded the freedom to introduce any new factors they felt were previously unconsidered but relevant to the topic (Loo et al., 2024). This inclusive, open-ended tactic guaranteed that this study integrated varied perspectives. It also adequately accounted for potentially emergent factors that might have surfaced, particularly in the unique context of the Fuzhou region. With the Delphi method's collaborative and iterative design, the first round aimed to not only recognize established factors but also facilitate the unveiling and refinement of newer ones (Ng et al., 2024). This ensured a holistic understanding that truly resonated with the current scenario of employee turnover in private education institutions in the Fuzhou region.

In the Delphi method's second phase, the study built upon the preliminary feedback from the first round. The objective was to gauge the consensus level and prioritize factors related to employee turnover intentions. Experts were tasked with ranking the significance of each dimension from the consolidated list of the first round (Tang et al., 2024). Their rankings assisted in assessing the relative importance of the varying factors. The survey adopted a ranking system where experts allocated a unique numerical rank to each factor, reflecting its significance. To maintain the ranking's integrity, each numerical rank could only be designated once, precluding potential analytical complications from repeated ranks (Krishnan et al., 2024). This quantitative stratagem enabled a structured evaluation of the factors, ensuring a detailed and objective investigation (Qureshi et al., 2023). Cumulative rankings derived from expert feedback presented invaluable insights, mirroring the collective perspectives of the panel (Durugbo et al., 2020).

The Delphi method's nature anticipated potential expert dropouts (Tan et al., 2024). Yet, the tool's effectiveness remained uncompromised. With each iteration founded on the preceding round's outcomes, continuity was preserved (Revez et al., 2020). This framework facilitated the ongoing refinement and consensus-building process, even in the event of intermittent expert departures between the survey rounds (Calleo & Pillaa, 2023).

Ethical considerations

Ethical approval for this study was secured from the ethical committee of INTI International University (Ref. No. INTI/UEC/2023/030). All participating experts provided written informed consent, confirming their voluntary participation and understanding of the study's objectives and procedures. Privacy and confidentiality were rigorously maintained throughout the study, with all responses anonymized and exclusively used for research purposes.

Questionnaire

The questionnaires designed for this Delphi study are critical in gathering expert insights into the factors influencing employee turnover intentions in Chinese private education institutions. They are structured to elicit comprehensive and systematic responses over two rounds.

During the first round, the questionnaire serves as the first point of contact with the expert panel, to gather a diverse range of perspectives on turnover factors. The questionnaire takes an open-ended approach, asking experts to list as many influencing factors as possible based on their experience while also providing thematic guidance based on recent literature. This not only aids in framing their ideas but also encourages the inclusion of new, potentially unexplored factors. Meanwhile, during round 2, the questionnaire builds on the initial data by focusing on the prioritization of identified factors. Prior to ranking, a summary of the first round's findings is presented, and organized into key dimensions to help recap and clarify previous discussions. Experts are then tasked with ranking these dimensions from most important to least important, with explicit instructions to use each rank only once to avoid confusion and ensure clear, distinct prioritization. The questionnaire format includes a response table, which effectively organizes the data and simplifies subsequent analysis. Examples of correct and incorrect ranking methods are provided to help experts avoid common errors. Both rounds of questionnaires are included in the Appendix ([supplementary material](#)).

Data analysis

The data collected through the Delphi study was analyzed in two major stages to ensure a thorough evaluation of factors influencing turnover intentions in private education institutions. Initially, during the first round, thematic analysis was used on the qualitative data derived from open-ended responses. This entailed categorizing the responses into themes based on content similarities, which were then used to guide the creation of the structured questionnaire for the second round. This method ensured that all relevant factors identified by the experts were documented and organized systematically.

Following the completion of the second Delphi round, we evaluated the degree of consensus among the expert panel concerning the prioritization of identified factors using Kendall's Coefficient of Concordance (W). This statistical test is specifically used to assess the agreement among raters in studies where rankings are the primary data form. To perform Kendall's W analysis, each expert's rankings of the factors were compiled into a matrix where columns represented individual factors and rows represented each expert's rankings. Kendall's W was then calculated to determine the consistency of rankings across the panel. A value of W ranges from 1 (most important) to 5 (least important), indicating the strength of the consensus among the experts. A statistically significant p -value less than 0.05, suggests a strong agreement among the experts regarding the importance of the factors. This would indicate that the experts used similar criteria in their evaluations, reflecting a strong consensus within the expert community (Weiss et al., 2021). In our analysis, a high value of W nearing 1 was anticipated, reflecting a strong expert consensus (Mubarak et al., 2019). Conversely, a lower value of W , particularly when coupled with a p -value greater than 0.05, indicates a lack of consensus or significant divergence in the expert rankings (Sun et al., 2023). Such a scenario would suggest the need for further discussion or additional rounds of the Delphi method to achieve a higher degree of agreement among the panelists. In cases where divergence persisted, initiating a third Delphi round would be considered to reconcile differences and enhance the robustness of the findings (Naisola-Ruiter, 2022).

Results

First round of the Delphi method

This study invited 40 experts to participate in the Delphi method on 23 June 2023. Email invitations were sent to experts for their convenience. Only 32 experts accepted the invitation and agreed to take part in the first round of the Delphi method. In the initial round of the Delphi method discussion, 32 relevant factors were suggested by the experts. Table 1 displayed the experts' demographic information.

These topics were subjected to a thorough review and thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Finally, these topics were divided into five dimensions that addressed the various factors influencing employee turnover intentions in Chinese private education institutions. Table 2 shows the classification results in detail.

Based on the results of the first round of Delphi, five dimensions covering various factors influencing turnover intentions were identified. (1) Career Development and Advancement Opportunities; (2) Compensation, Benefits, and Employee Recognition; (3) Work-life Balance and Work Environment; (4) Leadership, Management Support, and Organizational Culture; and (5) Professional Growth, Training, and Job Security are among these dimensions. Each dimension contains a set number of themes. The Career Development and Advancement Opportunities dimension, in particular, included 7 themes: Career development opportunities; External job opportunities; The smoothness level of promotion channels; Whether the work matches expectations; Increasing emerging institutions, attracting teachers with high benefits; New institutions poaching; The decency of work. The Compensation, Benefits, and Employee Recognition dimension included the following five themes: compensation and benefits; less annual bonus; whether the company can provide corresponding compensation; many people leaving, affecting work mentality; performance competition, performance decline. Ten themes were included in the Work-Life Balance and Work Environment dimension: High work pressure; The company's attendance is too strict; Long working hours; High work intensity; Job monotony; Job safety and stability; Work atmosphere; Whether it's pleasant to get along with colleagues; The demand level of the job market; and the meaning of work. Six

Table 1. Experts' profile.

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

Table 2. Consolidation of round one Delphi findings.

No	Dimensions	Themes
1	Career Development and Advancement Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Career development opportunities • External job opportunities • The smoothness level of promotion channels • Whether the work matches expectations • Increasing emerging institutions, attracting teachers with high benefits • New institutions poaching
2	Compensation, Benefits, and Employee Recognition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The decency of work • Compensation and benefits • Less annual bonus • Whether the company can provide corresponding compensation • Many people leaving, affecting work mentality • Performance competition, performance decline
3	Work-life Balance and Work Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High work pressure • The company's attendance is too strict • Long working hours • High work intensity • Job monotony • Job safety and stability • Work atmosphere • Whether it's pleasant to get along with colleagues • The demand level of the job market
4	Leadership, Management Support, and Organizational Culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The meaning of work • KPI assessment • Imperfect system mechanism • Whether the corporate culture is recognized • Work feels dull • The involution between various institutions is serious • Internet public opinion
5	Professional Growth, Training, and Job Security	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are too many basic courses to take every month • Difficulties in enrollment • Whether the classroom position is approved • Job (in)security

themes were covered in the Leadership, Management Support, and Organizational Culture dimension: KPI assessment; Imperfect system mechanism; Whether the corporate culture is recognized; Work feels dull; The involution between various institutions is serious; and Internet public opinion. Finally, there

were four themes in the Professional Growth, Training, and Job Security dimension: There are too many basic courses to take every month; Difficulties in enrollment; Whether the classroom position is approved; and Job (in)security.

Second round of the Delphi method

On 1 August 2023, the second phase of the Delphi study was initiated. Feedback from experts who participated in the initial round was organized into five dimensions. We re-engaged the same group of experts to prioritize the factors influencing the turnover intentions of employees in Chinese private education institutions. They were reminded that their feedback was based on their expert judgment without any right or wrong conclusions. Experts were guided to rate the categories from 1 (most significant) to 5 (least significant), ensuring each rating was unique to maintain statistical integrity. As shown in Table 3, 19 experts ranked the five dimensions during this second Delphi round, offering invaluable insights for subsequent analysis. The effectiveness and trustworthiness of the Delphi method increase when participants share a level of similarity (Taylor, 2020). It's noteworthy that eight experts opted out of the first round and another eight from the second round. Their decision to abstain from the Delphi process must be acknowledged and respected (Markmann et al., 2021). Their non-participation might stem from tight schedules or other commitments.

From the data in Table 3, the average rankings for the five categories vary between 2.24 and 3.74. The significance hierarchy for these dimensions is: Compensation, benefits, and employee recognition (2.16), career development and advancement opportunities (2.24), professional growth, training, and job security (3.42), leadership, management support, & organizational culture (3.45), and work-life balance and work environment (3.74).

Significantly, with a Kendall's W value of 0.222 and a p-value of 0.002, the rankings from the second round exhibit expert alignment. This consistency negates the requirement for a third Delphi round, confirming that the consensus has been adequately established.

Discussions

Based on these findings, the order of importance for the five dimensions is as follows: (1) Compensation, benefits, and employee recognition; (2) career development and advancement opportunities; (3) professional growth, training, and job security; (4) leadership, management support, & organizational culture; and (5) work-life balance and work environment. These results suggest that compensation, benefits, and

Table 3. Second round of Delphi method.

Experts	Career development and advancement opportunities	Compensation, benefits, and employee recognition	Work-life balance and work environment	Leadership, management support, & organizational culture	Professional growth, training, and job security
E1	1	3	5	2	4
E3	2	3	4	5	1
E4	3	2	4	5	1
E5	1	5	2	3	4
E6	2	1	4	5	3
E7	2	1	3	4	5
E8	2	1	5	4	3
E9	2	1	5	2	3
E10	1	2	3	4	5
E11	1	2	5	4	3
E12	3	1	2	4	5
E13	3	1	4	2	5
E17	1	5	3	2	4
E18	1	2	5	4	3
E19	5	4	3	2	1
E20	1	4	2	3	5
E21	2	1	3	4	5
E28	5	1	4	3	2
E31	4	1	5	3	2
Mean	2.24	2.16	3.74	3.45	3.42
Group Rank	2	1	5	4	3

employee recognition are the most critical aspects affecting the turnover intentions among employees in Chinese private education institutions.

Compensation, benefits, and employee recognition

One of the main factors that influences an employee's dedication to an organization is the perceived value they receive in exchange for their work, which includes monetary compensation and additional benefits. In the context of private education institutions competition, compensation is not only important for financial security, but also as a symbolic indicator of an individual's value and recognition within the institution (Rao, 2016). The annual bonus is a significant factor. A less generous annual bonus system in certain institutions can significantly impact turnover intention (Hoare, 2021). In the Chinese cultural and socioeconomic context, annual bonuses are not only considered as additional income, but also symbolize institutional appreciation and recognition for one's efforts throughout the year (Hao & Wang, 2022). A bonus that is perceived as inadequate or not proportional to one's efforts can demoralize employees and make them consider finding another job. The overarching question is whether institutions can provide compensation that corresponds with employees' perceptions of their value. Perceived misalignment among employees leads to a decrease in their trust in the institution's capacity to meet their long-term financial and professional requirements (Yang et al., 2023). The lack of trust becomes evident when multiple colleagues leave at the same time. The departure of a large number of employees can have a cascading impact, negatively affecting the motivation of those who remain and raising concerns about the institution's long-term stability and prospects (Wen, 2022). The competitive nature of private education performance contributes to increased turnover intention. A decline in performance at the individual or departmental level can lead to a negative cycle characterized by diminished motivation, decreased incentives, and ultimately, compromised job satisfaction. When individuals are consistently compared to their peers in terms of performance, and they perceive a decline in their own performance, it may lead them to consider pursuing roles in which evaluation systems are more equitable or environments that are less characterized by intense competition (Riyanto et al., 2021).

Career development and advancement opportunities

Staff turnover is a significant concern in the rapidly changing and dynamic landscape of private education institutions in China. Multiple interconnected factors have a substantial influence on the intentions of turnover within this particular workforce (Putri & Hasanati, 2022). Career development opportunities and advancement opportunities are crucial factor in employee turnover intention in this study. In today's society, individuals prioritize personal and professional development. Employees in Chinese private education institutions highly appreciate institutions that provide regular opportunities for enhancing skills and knowledge (Teng et al., 2019). Promotion opportunities and the efficiency of promotion channels are interdependent factors that impact employee decision-making (Zhang et al., 2020). Organizations that offer transparent and unobstructed career advancement opportunities are more likely to retain talented individuals compared to those with unclear or politicized promotion paths. The alignment between work and expectations is important. When there are discrepancies between job roles and preconceived notions, it can lead to dissatisfaction and a greater likelihood of seeking alternative options. The external job market is undeniably influential. The presence of external job opportunities, particularly from emerging institutions with appealing compensation packages, contributes to increased turnover intentions. These institutions attract employees with attractive benefits and actively recruit talented individuals from established institutions. The influx of new individuals contributing to the brain-drain phenomenon highlights the intense competitiveness of the academic job market in China (Yamada, 2023). The intrinsic quality of work, commonly referred to as work decency, is of utmost importance. Employees in private education institutions seek more than just financial compensation. They are interested in engaging positions that provide intellectual stimulation and contribute to society. On the other hand, the absence of opportunities for rotation can lead to stagnation, reducing the attractiveness of prolonged tenure at a particular institution (Wang, 2022). The cost of selecting alternative opportunities can encompass both

monetary and non-monetary aspects. The costs associated with relocation, including financial expenses and emotional strain, can discourage individuals from starting anew. Despite the costs involved, the perceived benefits may outweigh them, leading many individuals to consider them justifiable.

Professional growth, training, and job security

To comprehend turnover intention in China's private education sector, a comprehensive analysis is required that delves deeper into the underlying factors rather than focusing solely on superficial issues. The complex relationship between course loads, enrollment pressures, and job security presents a nuanced view of the challenges educators encounter (Nuere & De Miguel, 2021). This understanding allows for specific interventions and policy changes to be implemented. Educators face significant challenges due to the large number of mandatory basic courses they are required to take on a monthly basis. Participating in these courses consistently detracts from the time and effort that could be allocated to research, advanced teaching methods, and curriculum enhancement. Moreover, the need to consistently stay informed about fundamental subjects can result in fatigue and diminished job satisfaction, ultimately affecting turnover intention (Zhang et al., 2023). In addition, the complexities related to student enrollment present another obstacle. In a highly competitive academic setting, recruitment is crucial for both maintaining reputation and ensuring survival. Institutions face significant pressure to attract and retain high-quality students due to the connection between enrollment figures and institutional funding and resource allocation (Gutman & Hinote, 2020). The complexities of this process may be discouraging for educators, potentially impacting their perception of job security. The concepts of job safety, stability, and security are closely interconnected. China's private education system is influenced by policies, regulations, and political factors. The endorsement or rejection of a classroom position can significantly impact one's academic trajectory (Chan & Zhang, 2021). These determinations, which may appear administrative in nature, have significant implications for an individual's sense of belonging and worth within the institution. Furthermore, the ambiguous distinction between job insecurity and job instability exacerbates a widespread feeling of anxiety (Yam et al., 2022). Job insecurity encompasses concerns about unexpected job loss, while instability extends beyond that to include uncertainty about future career prospects and advancement within the organization.

Leadership, management support, & organizational culture

The use of Key Performance Indicators (KPI) assessments can lead to a limited emphasis on measurable accomplishments, potentially neglecting comprehensive professional development (O'Connell, 2022). The prioritization of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) in education can lead to educators feeling compelled to prioritize meeting these metrics over providing authentic education and personal growth opportunities. This can ultimately contribute to a sense of disillusionment. Additionally, the presence of flawed system mechanisms worsens turnover intentions. In an unclear and inefficient environment, educators may feel that their efforts are hindered, resulting in dissatisfaction. The absence of an efficient system not only affects productivity but also undermines educators' trust and commitment to the institution (Orunbon et al., 2022). Furthermore, the recognition and internalization of corporate culture are crucial factors. When employees align with the values of the organization, their loyalty is likely to be higher (Dhir et al., 2020). In cases where personal values conflict with the values of an institution, individuals may experience detachment, increasing the likelihood of attrition. Additionally, the perception of work monotony is a significant but often overlooked factor (Choy & Kamoche, 2021). Educators' motivation and job satisfaction decline when they perceive their work as repetitive or uninteresting, leading to a decreased inclination to seek external opportunities. Moreover, the occurrence of involution within different institutions is a crucial determinant. Competitive internal dynamics, characterized by institutions engaging in continuous cycles of one-upmanship without contributing genuine value, have the potential to demotivate educators (Krishna Kaiser, 2023). The repetitive nature of this cycle, which lacks significant advancement, can discourage educators from persisting in such a restrictive setting. In the current era of digital technology, the influence of internet public opinion is unparalleled. Negative online narratives

or perceptions can discourage potential talent and demoralize current employees, thus impacting an institution's ability to attract and retain skilled individuals (Lakeman et al., 2022). In light of the widespread nature of online commentary, it is imperative for institutions to take proactive measures in order to effectively manage their online reputation and thereby retain and attract talented individuals.

Work-life balance and work environment

A prominent factor in the academic profession is the significant work pressure. The combination of performance pressure and high expectations highlights the demanding nature of employees' responsibilities, requiring both expertise in their fields and consistent excellence in their work (Morrish, 2019). Work pressure and high work intensity, often resulting in long working hours, can exacerbate stress levels and potentially lead to an increased desire to leave if not effectively managed. The company's attendance policy is a crucial component. In today's society, where there is a growing emphasis on flexibility and achieving a balance between work and personal life, the imposition of strict attendance requirements may be seen as antiquated and inflexible, potentially leading to reduced job satisfaction (Wang et al., 2022). The combination of rigidity and job monotony can lead to feelings of stagnation and limited professional development, motivating individuals to pursue positions that provide variety and dynamic challenges. Another important factor that is less tangible but equally significant is the work environment. The qualitative aspects of the workplace, including interpersonal relationships with colleagues and the overall atmosphere, significantly influence employees' work experiences (Thant & Chang, 2021). Positive interpersonal relationships promote collaboration and increase job satisfaction. On the other hand, a hostile environment can significantly amplify the desire to leave a job. Moreover, the perceived level of job stability within private education institutions plays a significant role in individuals' choices to either remain in or depart from their positions. In a dynamic job market characterized by varying demand levels, employees are more inclined to remain in their positions when they perceive their roles as stable. On the other hand, when the market presents more favorable prospects with increased advantages, the cost associated with selecting alternative opportunities decreases (Ampofo & Karatepe, 2022). This is closely linked to individual and societal interpretations of the significance of work. When individuals perceive a lack of purpose or alignment between their roles and personal/professional aspirations, they are more likely to be attracted to alternative opportunities.

Conclusion, limitations, and future recommendations

This study examines the factors influencing employee turnover intention in China's academic institutions through the Delphi research method. Modern Chinese parents devote a huge amount of attention to the academic achievement of their kids, which has contributed to the country's educational system reaching unprecedented levels. However, the growth of the educational sector comes with the challenge of retaining good employees, which directly influences the operational efficiency of academic institutions in China. The high turnover rate in the academic sector jeopardizes organizational stability, drives up expenses, and compromises the continuity and quality of education. To address this current challenge faced by China's educational institutions, this research conducts an in-depth exploration of the factors influencing employee turnover intention in China's academic institutions through a qualitative research method called the Delphi method. The reason for choosing the Delphi research method is to investigate the probing topic by collecting and analyzing opinions from various experts with the aim of providing holistic results of the factors influencing employee turnover intention. After two rounds of the Delphi method, the consensus of 40 experts has been reached. The results show that the order of importance for the five dimensions is as follows: (1) compensation, benefits, and employee recognition; (2) career development and advancement opportunities; (3) professional growth, training, and job security; (4) leadership, management support, and organizational culture; and (5) work-life balance and work environment. The dimension of compensation, benefits, and employee recognition is the most important factor influencing employee turnover intention, and this finding is expectedly consistent with the Chinese cultural and socioeconomic setting. In Chinese society, annual bonuses and other compensation are not only considered as additional income and advantages to the employees but also represent appreciation

and recognition from the institutions for one's efforts throughout the year. Besides, since the cost of living in China has increased due to China's strong economic growth in the past decade, employees are becoming more aware of the importance of compensation and benefits to their general well-being and life satisfaction. On the other hand, the dimension of work-life balance and work environment is the least important factor influencing employee turnover intention in China's academic institutions. This finding is consistent with the culture in China, as Chinese put stronger emphasis on commitment to work, prioritize professional responsibilities over their personal lives, and are more willing to tolerate the work-life imbalance and less-satisfactory work environments. This study contributes to the theoretical insight of employee turnover intention in the context of China's educational institutions. It highlights the unique characteristics of cultural factors in China, namely the importance of integrating Chinese cultural norms and shared values into strategies to effectively address the turnover issue in China. Moreover, this study contributes to the managerial implications for the policymakers of China's educational institutions, which they should give top priority to the design and creation of comprehensive compensation and benefits packages, and robust employee recognition programs that meet the requirements and needs of employees. Furthermore, the management should develop a deep understanding of Chinese cultural values and incorporate them into their efforts to retain good employees.

However, the research has several limitations that must be acknowledged. To begin, the findings are primarily based on Fuzhou's socioeconomic, cultural, and institutional characteristics, which may limit their applicability to other regions. The geographical focus limits the results' applicability to broader educational settings across China's diverse landscape, which is characterized by significant urban-rural and inter-regional disparities. Furthermore, the study's scope excludes comparative analyses with other educational environments, either within China or internationally, which could help us understand the contextual influences on turnover intentions.

To address these limitations and broaden the study's applicability, future research should consider expanding the geographical scope to include a variety of locations throughout China, including both urban and rural areas. Comparative studies of different types of educational institutions public and private across various educational levels would also be beneficial. These efforts may aid in identifying both general and context-specific factors influencing employee turnover intentions. Furthermore, incorporating longitudinal research designs and developing quantitative survey instruments based on current findings may allow for a more dynamic analysis of turnover intentions, capturing changes over time and providing a comprehensive picture of the factors at play. By expanding the research in these directions, future studies can provide richer, more actionable insights, assisting educational institutions around the world in developing effective employee retention strategies.

Author contribution

Conception and design: Leilei Jiang, Walton Wider, & Guanqing Ye; Analysis and interpretation of the data: Leilei Jiang, Walton Wider, & Guanqing Ye; the drafting of the paper: Mcxin Tee, A. K. Mahbulul Hye, Alex Lee, & Jem Cloyd M. Tanucan; Revising it critically for intellectual content: Leilei Jiang, Walton Wider, & Guanqing Ye; Final approval of the version to be published: Leilei Jiang, Walton Wider, & Guanqing Ye; All authors agree to be accountable for all aspects of the work.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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Data availability Statement

The data are available and will be provided upon reasonable request from the corresponding author.

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