

EFFECT OF CAREER DEVELOPMENT ON EMPLOYEE TURNOVER AT THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF EASTERN AFRICA NAIROBI, KENYA

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Abstract:

This study examined the effect of career development on employee turnover at the Catholic University of Eastern Africa (CUEA), Nairobi. The study was anchored by the Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory. A descriptive research design was employed, relying on quantitative data collected through structured questionnaires. The target population comprised 492 employees, including academic, administrative, and support staff. A stratified random sampling technique was used to select a sample of 221 respondents, determined using Yamane's formula. To ensure validity and reliability, the data collection instruments were pilot-tested and analyzed using Cronbach's alpha. Descriptive statistics and multiple linear regression were applied for data analysis to determine the relationship between career development and employee turnover. The findings revealed a negative but statistically insignificant relationship between career development and employee turnover ($b = -0.104$, $p > 0.05$). This implies that while career development may slightly reduce turnover, its individual effect is weak and not statistically significant. However, career development was acknowledged as an essential component of retention strategies, particularly when combined with factors like competitive compensation and a supportive work environment. The study concluded that implementing structured and clearly communicated career development programs—such as mentorship, training, internal promotions, and defined career paths—could foster employee commitment and reduce turnover intentions over time. It recommended that institutions like CUEA could invest in sustainable professional development initiatives and examine how leadership and institutional culture could enhance career advancement efforts.

Keywords: Career Development, Catholic University of Eastern Africa, Employee Retention, Employee Turnover, Hertzberg Two-Factor Theory.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

Career development is increasingly recognized as a critical retention strategy in higher education institutions, including private universities such as the Catholic University of Eastern Africa (CUEA), Nairobi. As universities face heightened competition for top talent, the ability to attract and retain skilled personnel has become central to institutional growth and performance (Murei & Aruwasa, 2021). High turnover rates in private universities,

particularly among academic and support staff, not only disrupt continuity but also inflate recruitment and training costs while lowering institutional effectiveness (Salum et al., 2023).

Career development refers to the structured efforts by institutions to provide opportunities for employee growth through training, mentoring, internal promotions, and clearly defined advancement pathways. According to Mahadi et al. (2020), these practices are essential in motivating employees, increasing their commitment, and reducing their intention to leave. Ramachandran and Prasad (2022) affirm that structured career development enhances job satisfaction and strengthens employee-employer relationships, thereby fostering retention.

Pallangyo and Hanai (2020) highlight that employees are a university's most valuable asset, and investing in their career advancement is key to long-term success. Wardhani et al. (2020) also found that career development initiatives directly contribute to employee loyalty and performance. In the context of Nairobi's private universities particularly CUEA, providing ongoing professional development is essential to remain competitive, especially in a landscape where institutions are vying for skilled educators and administrators. Career development, therefore, plays a vital role in aligning individual growth with institutional goals. By supporting employees' aspirations, universities can build a committed, high-performing workforce capable of achieving academic and organizational excellence (Atiq & Usmani, 2023; Carr, 2025).

1.2 Problem Statement

Career development is globally recognized as a critical component of employee satisfaction, engagement, and retention. However, there is a notable gap in research regarding how structured career development initiatives influence employee turnover within private universities in sub-Saharan Africa—particularly faith-based institutions like the Catholic University of Eastern Africa (CUEA). While studies such as Dewi and Nurhayati (2021) highlight the positive effect of career development on reducing turnover intentions, these studies are often based in corporate or industrial settings and fail to reflect the complexities of academic environments guided by religious values. In the Kenyan context, staff turnover in private universities remains a pressing concern, largely attributed to limited career advancement opportunities. Reports indicate that institutions like CUEA have experienced significant staff exits in recent years, leading to operational inefficiencies and increased recruitment costs (CUEA HRM Report, 2024). Although national education and labor frameworks promote professional development, implementation within private institutions is inconsistent and insufficient.

Despite the importance of career progression, empirical studies specifically addressing how development strategies—such as mentorship, training, promotions, and succession planning—affect employee retention in faith-based private universities are scarce. Most existing research either emphasizes public universities or isolates single aspects of career development without exploring its holistic role in influencing retention. This lack of contextual and sector-specific evidence presents a methodological and conceptual gap in understanding how private universities in Kenya, particularly those with religious affiliations, can strategically retain their academic and administrative workforce. Consequently, many capable staff members migrate to public universities or the private sector where career growth opportunities are more robust and structured.

This study seeks to address these gaps by investigating the role of career development in reducing employee turnover at CUEA. By drawing on Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, the research will provide a multidimensional framework for understanding how career development affects staff retention decisions. The study will further explore how faith-based institutions can institutionalize effective career development strategies aligned with their religious ethos and academic mission. The findings will offer practical insights for HR practitioners, university administrators, policymakers, and scholars by proposing actionable frameworks for improving retention through career growth initiatives. In doing so, the study aims to contribute to the broader literature on employee retention and human resource development within African higher education institutions.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Framework

Frederick Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, also referred to as the Motivator-Hygiene Theory, provides a foundational lens for understanding the dynamics of job satisfaction and employee turnover. Developed in 1959, the theory distinguishes between two categories of factors that influence employee attitudes: motivators and

hygiene factors. Motivators are intrinsic to the nature of the work and include elements such as achievement, recognition, responsibility, opportunities for advancement, and personal growth. These factors address employees' higher-order psychological needs and are essential for fostering job satisfaction, motivation, and long-term organizational commitment.

On the other hand, hygiene factors are extrinsic and relate to the broader work environment. These include salary, organizational policies, supervision, job security, and working conditions. While these factors may not directly motivate employees, their absence can lead to dissatisfaction, reduced morale, and increased turnover. Herzberg emphasized that addressing hygiene factors helps prevent employee dissatisfaction, but true motivation and retention are driven by the presence of motivators (Galanakis & Peramatzis, 2022).

This theory is directly applicable to the current study on the influence of career development on employee turnover at the Catholic University of Eastern Africa (CUEA). Within this context, career development is conceptualized as a key motivator, offering employees opportunities for training, advancement, mentorship, and personal improvement. These elements are critical in promoting job satisfaction and fostering a sense of loyalty and engagement among staff. When employees perceive clear and attainable growth paths, they are more likely to remain committed to the institution. Simultaneously, hygiene factors such as supportive leadership, fair workplace policies, and competitive compensation must be in place to prevent dissatisfaction. Even when career development opportunities exist, the absence of these foundational conditions can lead to frustration and attrition.

Dewi and Nurhayati (2021) examined the impact of career development on employee turnover intent at PT Control Systems Arena Para Nusa, using job satisfaction and organizational commitment as mediating variables. Adopting a quantitative approach with purposive sampling, they collected data from 132 employees and analyzed it using Structural Equation Modelling-Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS). The study found that career development significantly reduced turnover intent and positively influenced job satisfaction and organizational commitment; however, job satisfaction alone did not have a significant effect on turnover intent. Instead, organizational commitment emerged as a key mediator. While their study offers valuable insights within a manufacturing context in Indonesia, it did not account for other essential retention strategies such as work-life balance, supportive work environments, and competitive compensation. In contrast, the current study, conducted at the Catholic University of Eastern Africa in Nairobi County, Kenya, focuses specifically on the influence of career development on employee turnover through the lens of Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory. By emphasizing both intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors, this research provides a deeper understanding of how career development influences employee retention in a faith-based higher education context. Additionally, it employs a descriptive research design with a broader and more inclusive sampling strategy, thereby addressing the contextual and methodological limitations of Dewi and Nurhayati's work.

Similarly, Kasdorf and Kayaalp (2022) explored the relationship between employee perception of career development (EPCD) and intent to stay within a healthcare organization undergoing a merger, focusing on job satisfaction and supervisor support as mediators. Using a quantitative approach and surveying 687 employees, they applied a moderated mediation model and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) for analysis. Their findings showed that employees who perceived strong career development opportunities were more likely to remain, particularly when supported by supervisors and experiencing job satisfaction. Although insightful, the study lacked a clearly defined theoretical framework and focused narrowly on career advancement within a healthcare context. In contrast, the current study at Catholic University of Eastern Africa (CUEA) in Nairobi County, Kenya, focuses on the influence of career development on employee turnover through the lens of Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, which distinguishes between intrinsic and extrinsic motivators. Furthermore, the present research integrates additional retention factors such as work environment and competitive compensation and adopts a descriptive design with a broader sampling strategy. This allows for a more holistic and contextually relevant understanding of employee turnover in a faith-based higher education institution, addressing theoretical, conceptual, and contextual limitations found in Kasdorf and Kayaalp's work.

Finally, Adiputra and Milleny (2024) investigated the impact of career development and workload on employee turnover intention, with job satisfaction serving as a mediating variable, using data collected from 155 employees

in Jakarta's startup sector through proportionate sampling. Their findings revealed that while career development enhances job satisfaction and indirectly reduces turnover intention, workload negatively impacts job satisfaction and strongly correlates with higher turnover intention. Although their study provides important insights into the interplay between workload, job satisfaction, and turnover, it is limited by its narrow scope and lack of theoretical grounding. In contrast, the current study at the Catholic University of Eastern Africa in Nairobi County, Kenya, examines the influence of career development on employee turnover specifically through the framework of Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, emphasizing both intrinsic and extrinsic motivators. It also broadens the conceptual focus to include other key retention strategies such as supportive work environments, competitive compensation, and work-life balance. Methodologically, the present study uses a descriptive research design and a more inclusive sampling strategy to ensure contextual relevance and depth. By addressing the theoretical, conceptual, and contextual limitations of Adiputra and Milleny's study, this research offers a more comprehensive understanding of employee retention in a faith-based higher education setting.

3. METHODOLOGY

In this study, a descriptive research design was adopted because it allowed for the systematic collection of detailed information and facilitated an in-depth understanding of how career development initiatives influence employee turnover. This design was appropriate for identifying key turnover indicators such as staff retention levels, frequency of resignations, and exit interview outcomes without manipulating the study variables (Tabuena et al., 2021). The target population comprised academic, administrative, and non-academic staff members at the Catholic University of Eastern Africa (CUEA) Main Campus, totalling 492 employees (HRM Department, CUEA, 2025). These staff members were selected because of their involvement in core institutional functions and their ability to offer practical insights into the impact of career development on retention decisions.

This study employed a stratified random sampling technique to ensure that each employee category (academic and non-academic) was proportionally represented. The sample size was determined using Yamane's (1967) formula for sample size calculation. Thus, a sample of 221 staff members was selected. The stratified random sample included 108 academic staff and 113 non-academic staff, proportionate to their population distribution. Primary data were collected using a structured questionnaire, which allowed for the collection of standardized responses across a broad sample. The questionnaire was designed to capture views on career development opportunities, turnover intentions, and demographic data. A five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree) was used to measure levels of agreement with various career development statements (Nanjundeswaraswamy & Divakar, 2021).

To ensure content validity, the questionnaire was reviewed by three experts in Human Resource Management and Educational Research, who assessed the relevance and clarity of the items. Their feedback was used to revise ambiguous questions, resulting in improved alignment with study objectives (Almanasreh et al., 2019). The Content Validity Index (CVI) calculated yielded a value of 0.87, indicating a high level of content appropriateness. A pilot study was conducted using 36 participants (approximately 30% of the sample) from three private universities not involved in the main study. This helped to test the reliability and internal consistency of the questionnaire (Bujang et al., 2024). Using Cronbach's Alpha, values greater than 0.7 were recorded for all constructs, confirming the reliability of the instrument (Bujang et al., 2019).

Upon receiving ethical clearance from NACOSTI and authorization from CUEA administration, the researcher distributed the questionnaires using a drop-and-pick method. An introductory letter accompanied each questionnaire to explain the study's purpose, assure confidentiality, and emphasize voluntary participation. A research assistant helped coordinate the process to enhance response rates. Data collected were analyzed using SPSS software version 23. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies and means were used to summarize the demographic and career development data. Inferential statistics, including correlation and regression analysis, were used to examine the relationship between career development and employee turnover. Results were presented using tables, charts, and figures for clarity and ease of interpretation.

4. RESULTS

4.1 Descriptive Statistics

The study utilized a 5-point Likert scale to examine the influence of career development on employee turnover at the Catholic University of Eastern Africa (CUEA). The results revealed generally positive perceptions among staff regarding the availability and influence of career development initiatives. With a mean score of 4.24 and a standard deviation (SD) of 0.86, the highest-rated item was the statement “I feel supported in taking steps to advance my career within CUEA”, indicating strong institutional support for personal growth. Similarly, mentorship opportunities received a mean of 3.93 (SD = 1.02), suggesting that structured mentorship plays a significant role in enhancing employees’ career progression. Coaching sessions were also highly rated (mean = 3.83; SD = 0.93), reflecting their contribution to professional development. Regarding fairness in career promotion, 67% of employees agreed or strongly agreed that such opportunities were fairly distributed, corresponding to a mean of 3.80 with a SD of 1.00. This reflects moderate satisfaction but also signals an area that may need attention. The variation in responses—particularly in statements concerning promotion and planning career goals—illustrates differing employee experiences across departments and levels.

Overall, the total mean across all items was 3.87, with a standard deviation of 0.94, confirming a generally favorable perception of CUEA’s career development efforts. These findings underscore the vital role of well-structured development programs in reducing turnover. Employees who feel supported in their career advancement are more likely to remain committed to the institution, reinforcing Herzberg’s Two-Factor Theory, which highlights professional growth, mentorship, and recognition as key intrinsic motivators for job satisfaction and retention.

These results align with prior empirical findings. For instance, Dewi and Nurhayati (2021) reported that structured career development enhances organizational commitment, which indirectly reduces turnover intention, even when job satisfaction alone does not. Likewise, Kasdorf and Kayaalp (2022) emphasized the strategic role of career advancement and satisfaction as key retention tools. In addition, Adiputra and Milleny (2024) found that career growth positively influences satisfaction and reduces turnover, though workload can mediate this relationship negatively.

In the case of CUEA, while 78.4% of employees indicated encouragement to pursue career advancement, the perception of fairness in promotion (67%) suggests a potential hygiene factor (per Herzberg) that could lead to dissatisfaction if not addressed. This calls for increased transparency and equity in promotion processes. Together, the evidence confirms that career development programs—particularly those involving mentorship, coaching, and fair promotional pathways—serve as critical levers in reducing employee turnover. Ensuring equitable access and managing workloads are essential to sustaining these positive effects. The results are illustrated in Table 3.1 below.

Table 4.1: Career Development Opportunities and Employee turnover (N = 221)

Statement	Strongly Disagree (n, %)	Disagree (n, %)	Neutral (n, %)	Agree (n, %)	Strongly Agree (n, %)	Mean	SD
CUEA offers training programs that help me grow professionally.	5.4%	8.1%	20.4%	41.2%	24.9%	3.64	0.78
I have access to mentorship opportunities that support my career development.	4.5%	6.3%	18.1%	37.6%	33.5%	3.93	1.02
Clear pathways for promotion are available in CUEA.	6.8%	7.7%	19.0%	36.2%	30.3%	3.80	1.01
CUEA encourages me to plan my career goals.	5.9%	6.3%	17.6%	38.9%	31.3%	3.85	0.95

Statement	Strongly Disagree (n, %)	Disagree (n, %)	Neutral (n, %)	Agree (n, %)	Strongly Agree (n, %)	Mean	SD
Career promotion opportunities are fairly provided at CUEA.	7.2%	7.7%	18.1%	36.9%	30.1%	3.80	1.00
Coaching sessions provided by CUEA enhance my professional growth.	5.4%	6.8%	16.3%	40.5%	31.0%	3.83	0.93
I feel supported in taking steps to advance my career within CUEA.	3.6%	4.9%	13.1%	37.1%	41.3%	4.24	0.86
Total (n, %)	5.7%	7.1%	18.1%	39.6%	32.8%	3.87	0.94

4.2 Correlation Analysis

The results of the correlation analysis indicate a weak and statistically insignificant negative correlation ($r = -0.104$, $p > 0.05$) between employee turnover and career development. This suggests that opportunities for career development alone may not directly influence an employee's decision to stay within an organization. However, these results appear nuanced when viewed alongside the findings of Kasdorf and Kayaalp (2022), who demonstrated that employee perception of career development significantly influences retention, particularly when mediated by job satisfaction and supervisor support. Their study in a healthcare setting highlighted that when employees perceive genuine growth opportunities—especially in a supportive environment—they are more likely to remain. Similarly, Dewi and Nurhayati (2021) found that career development reduces turnover intent, especially when it enhances organizational commitment. Although job satisfaction alone did not directly lower turnover, its role in fostering commitment further supports the idea that career development can reduce turnover indirectly. Hence, despite the weak direct correlation observed in the current study, existing literature affirms that career development has a meaningful impact on retention when mediated through other organizational factors.

Table 4.2: Correlation coefficients

		CD	EMPLOYEE TURNOVER
Pearson	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	-.104**
	Sig. (1-tailed)	0.000	0.000
		-.104**	1.000
EMPLOYEE TURNOVER	Correlation Coefficient	.000	0.000
	Sig. (1-tailed)		

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed).

4.3 Regression Analysis

The results from the regression coefficient reveal that career development had a weak and statistically insignificant positive effect on employee turnover ($\beta = 0.066$, $p = 0.394$), indicating that in isolation, career development initiatives do not significantly reduce turnover rates among employees. This outcome appears to contrast with some existing literature but aligns with the findings of Adiputra and Milleny (2024), who also observed a non-significant direct relationship between career development and turnover intention. However,

their study in startup environments emphasized that career development indirectly decreases turnover through job satisfaction. While career development may not directly curb turnover, it positively influences job satisfaction, which in turn mediates a reduction in turnover intentions. Therefore, although the direct effect in the present study is weak, the literature suggests that the true value of career development in employee retention lies in its indirect effects through job satisfaction.

Table 4.3: Regression Coefficient

		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	
		B	Std. Error	T Beta	Sig.
1	(Constant)	36.531	2.297		0.000
	CD	0.054	0.063	0.066	0.394

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusions

This study offers vital insights into the nuanced role of career development in influencing employee turnover within the context of the Catholic University of Eastern Africa (CUEA). While career development emerged as a secondary factor compared to other factors such as competitive compensation, supportive work environment, and work-life balance, its strategic significance in fostering employee commitment and satisfaction cannot be overstated. The study highlights that although the direct statistical relationship between career development and turnover was weak and insignificant, the practical implications are more layered. Employees value opportunities for growth, advancement, and skill enhancement—not only as an end in themselves but as critical factors that shape their perception of the organization's investment in their future.

Our findings are particularly important because they challenge organizations like CUEA to view career development not merely as a retention tactic but as a strategic engagement tool. In today's competitive job market, where employees—especially in academia and knowledge-based sectors—seek more than monetary rewards, structured career development programs serve as a powerful means to build long-term loyalty. When career development is integrated with other support mechanisms such as supervisor encouragement and performance feedback, its impact on retention becomes more substantial, as also reflected in supporting studies like that of Adiputra and Milleny (2024).

Moreover, this study is significant in emphasizing the indirect value of career development. While it may not directly and immediately reduce turnover, it plays a pivotal mediating role through job satisfaction and organizational commitment. In an environment like CUEA, where attracting and retaining skilled professionals is essential for institutional stability and academic excellence, developing long-term career paths, offering professional development workshops, and recognizing internal talent can increase employee engagement and reduce attrition over time.

The advantage of this study lies in its contribution to human resource decision-making through empirical evidence. By revealing the understated yet critical role of career development, it provides a roadmap for designing retention strategies that go beyond financial incentives to include meaningful professional growth. This research does not attempt to rank career development over other strategies but presents it as an indispensable part of a holistic retention framework. Therefore, organizations that ignore the developmental aspirations of their workforce risk losing valuable talent, even if they offer competitive compensation.

Despite its contributions, the study had several limitations. It employed a descriptive research design with a quantitative approach, which, while useful for establishing relationships among variables, was not sufficient to capture the complex and dynamic nature of employee turnover. The use of structured questionnaires limited the exploration of deeper, unanticipated insights. Furthermore, being cross-sectional in nature, the study could not assess changes over time or causality between career development initiatives and actual turnover. Its focus on a

single private university in Nairobi County also restricts the generalizability of the findings to other settings such as public universities or institutions in other regions.

Nevertheless, the study's findings have practical applications for both policy and practice. Universities and similar institutions can use these insights to design targeted career development initiatives that align employee aspirations with institutional goals. Future studies may extend this work by employing longitudinal designs, qualitative methods, or broader sampling across various types of universities. By continuing to explore the role of career development in employee retention, scholars and practitioners can foster more sustainable and engaged academic workforces.

5.2 Recommendations

Based on the study's findings on the influence of career development on employee turnover at the Catholic University of Eastern Africa (CUEA), the following recommendations are proposed to enhance employee retention through strengthened career development strategies: CUEA should invest in comprehensive and structured career development programs that include clearly defined career progression paths and mentorship initiatives. Such strategies will provide employees with a sense of direction and purpose, improving job satisfaction and loyalty. The university must design training programs tailored to professional needs, with regular assessments to track career growth and align them with institutional goals.

To increase the effectiveness of career development, human resource managers should implement individual development plans and establish mentorship frameworks that pair junior staff with experienced mentors for knowledge transfer and growth. Moreover, the institution should foster a culture of continuous learning by supporting attendance at seminars, workshops, and advanced academic pursuits.

Given that only 35% of employees currently consider career development as a major factor in their retention decisions, CUEA should also actively communicate the long-term benefits and opportunities available through these programs. This includes showcasing success stories of internal promotions and growth, thereby encouraging more staff to see the institution as a place for long-term professional advancement.

Finally, career development initiatives must be monitored and evaluated periodically to ensure they meet employee expectations and contribute meaningfully to retention. Future adjustments should be evidence-driven and responsive to employee feedback, ensuring that the programs remain relevant, attractive, and impactful in reducing turnover.

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