




Factors affecting talent retention in SMEs in a competitive environment

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ABSTRACT

Article History

Received: 16 November 2022

Revised: 10 August 2023

Accepted: 4 September 2023

Published: 1 December 2023

Keywords

Decent job

Employee turnover

Human Resource Practices

Self-efficacy

Small enterprise

Staff retention strategies

Talent retention

Training and development

Workforce management

Work-life balance.

The purpose of the study is to investigate the key determinants that influence talent retention within Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) operating in a highly competitive world. The study used a quantitative methodology that focuses on gathering numerical data that can be evaluated using an approach called Partial Least Square-Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM). To facilitate data collection, online surveys were made available to respondents in convenient ways to give their opinion at any time and from any location. PLS-SEM was used to examine a set of hypotheses resulting from a theoretical model of turnover intention. According to empirical findings, there was just one factor—work-life balance—that had a substantial impact on employee retention. Two independent variables, self-efficacy and training and development, verified that they do not support the hypothesis and have no significant relationship. Understanding these driving forces holds paramount importance for Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) as they endeavor to attract and retain top-tier talent. By adjusting and fine-tuning their policies and operational procedures, SMEs can cultivate an environment conducive not only to the preservation of proficient personnel but also to their growth. Consequently, this study emphasizes the critical importance of customized methodology and the demand for personalized strategies that take into consideration and address the needs of SMEs.

Contribution/Originality: The study will assist Human Resource Managers in acquiring recommendations for sustaining talent in organization. It is important for Human Resource Managers to understand the critical predictors of talent retention, which will be an added value for SMEs to gain insights into the actual cause of employee turnover.

1. INTRODUCTION

Although it is a global issue, Malaysian SMEs seem to be particularly struggling with the retention of talent given the country's growing skills scarcity. The current economic conditions positively impact those seeking employment within the global labor market. However, a significant talent shortage exists in different sectors and other countries, leading to a talent mismatch problem (Hongal & Kinange, 2020). The corporate world needs someone with multitasking skills; talent acquisition and talent retention have become challenging. Failure to address talent retention can lead to a lack of qualified and high-performing employees, which will negatively impact

the productivity of these SMEs. Human capital is a critical factor in organizational success, and currently, security and wages cannot be considered vital determinants.

According to [Mey, Poisat, and Stindt \(2021\)](#), the departure of highly skilled and well-trained employees is the highest cost of employee turnover. It can be seen as intangible costs associated with turnover, sometimes underestimated, such as recruitment fees and other expenses incurred by the organization ([Al-Suraihi, Samikon, Al-Suraihi, & Ibrahim, 2021](#)). In this case, businesses find themselves trapped in a costly and complex process of recruiting and retaining talent, regardless of their origin or culture. The biggest issue that most SMEs face, according to [Hee and Ann \(2019\)](#), is talent retention. SMEs' top worry has shifted to talent retention; acquisition and retention issues will become the most pressing labor management challenges swiftly ([Mohammed, Baig, & Gururajan, 2020](#)). According to [Hee and Ann \(2019\)](#), SMEs require people to use their job talents and produce an excellent overall performance to fulfil companies' goals.

Employees are the backbone and human capital for a company's successful operation. With high turnover rates, SMEs must also retain qualified and competent people in their industry ([Al-Suraihi et al., 2021](#)). It stresses that today's SMEs face the issue of growing employee turnover and how to retain them, which is one of the most persistent problems ([Mohammed et al., 2020](#)). This research will assist SMEs in aligning their company's innovation and foresight with talent retention strategies to reduce turnover rates steadily.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Underlying Theory

Herzberg's two-factor theory, which examines many demands about environmental problems, including intrinsic motivations and other strategies to motivate workers, serves as the foundation for this study ([Thant & Chang, 2021](#)). [Herzberg \(1968\)](#) proposed a few factors, including business policy and administration, job security, remuneration, supervision, interpersonal relationships, and supervisory authority, that reduce job unhappiness. In contrast, factors that contribute to job satisfaction include success, progress, recognition, responsibility, and the work itself. [Mullen \(2021\)](#) claims that motivators are assessed on a scale from neutral to highly satisfied, whereas hygiene issues are ranked from neutral to extremely unsatisfied. The elements of the intervention that are most likely to have a positive long-term impact on employees' satisfaction, retention, and intrinsic motivation are being considered in this theory.

When examining the hygiene component in the relationship between training and development and talent retention for this study, Herzberg's theory was supported. According to [Herzberg \(1987\)](#), a lack of hygiene in a workplace includes managerial and interpersonal connections, pay, job security, opportunities for training and development, and the working environment. Employees refuse to stay in the organization due to dissatisfaction. Herzberg's theory was supported when examining the motivation element in terms of the connections between self-efficacy, work-life balance, and talent retention. According to Herzberg, success can result from positive emotions including self-efficacy, work-life balance, accomplishment, and advancement. He emphasized the importance of career enrichment and set it apart from employment growth, which entails more responsibility and engagement, prospects for promotion, and a sense of success. Employee retention will increase as a result ([Bevins, 2018](#)).

2.2. Training and Development and Talent Retention

[Oludayo, Akanbi, Obot, Popoola, and Atayero \(2018\)](#) claim that most firms in developing nations are now seeking practical strategies to keep their workers by improving the organization's attractiveness by giving employees options for training and development. Training that emphasizes developing skills that are less transferable to other businesses has a positive impact on talent retention since talent is more mobile ([Michailova & Ott, 2019](#)). Additionally, training fosters a sense of belonging and connection among individuals to their work. Staff turnover has been observed because of a lack of career development, training, and talent recognition ([Loan,](#)

Brahmi, Nuong, & Binh, 2023; Shani & Senthilkumar, 2020). Additionally, studies have found that workers who feel like they are growing and learning at work are less likely to quit. Employees, on the other hand, begin looking externally for alternative work opportunities if they believe their careers are stagnating (Nguyen, 2020). Training and development facilitate employers' job performance or feelings of appreciation, which may have a favorable impact on work output. Employees that receive more training than their peers demonstrate higher levels of commitment, according to Burhan et al. (2021). As the investor and with the expectation of a return in the form of commitment and staff retention, the business bears all the costs related to employee training and development (Shibu & Hariharasudhan, 2022). The ability of employees to solve problems will be enhanced, and doing so will increase their self-assurance, motivation, and commitment to their work (Singh, Pradhan, Panigrahy, & Jena, 2019). Therefore, they are more likely to stay with the business. Al Suwaidi and Akmal (2022) claim that regular training modifications, as opposed to those made just when necessary, have a large and powerful effect on the expansion of employment in SMEs.

Hypothesis 1 (H1): There is a significant relationship between training and development and talent retention in the competitive environment of Malaysian SMEs.

2.3. Self-Efficacy and Talent Retention

Job happiness is one of the factors that contribute to higher employee retention. Contented workers are less likely to leave their jobs than disgruntled ones (Nusannas et al., 2020). Employees' personal characteristics, including self-esteem, self-efficacy, stress levels, seniority, and self-monitoring, may have an impact on how satisfied they are with their jobs. Assume, for instance, that self-efficacy is a gauge of a person's ability and confidence in performing tasks chosen to increase employee work satisfaction (Ghosh, Sengupta, Narayanamurthy, & Ishizaka, 2023). Company initiatives and helpful coworkers might be able to help employees who lack self-efficacy. As a result, individuals can experience job satisfaction because they receive the assistance, they require to feel competent in their responsibilities and motivated to remain in the organization. Additionally, self-efficacy is a person's assessment of how their environment will respond to them. Syabarrudin, Eliyana, and Naimah (2020) contend that a self-assured worker is a highly regarded individual who believes he has a better chance of excelling in his line of work and is better prepared to take risks at work. According to Ghosh et al. (2023), individuals who have strong self-efficacy and job satisfaction perform their tasks noticeably better than their peers, which benefits the company by enhancing organizational control. Employee collaboration, relationship building, and enjoyment at work will all help the SME achieve its goals. Employee personalities frequently shape and influence workplace happiness (Syabarrudin et al., 2020).

Hypothesis 2: There is a significant relationship between self-efficacy and talent retention in the competitive environment of Malaysian SMEs.

2.4. Work-Life Balance and Talent Retention

Work-life balance is now utilized on a global scale as a strategy for HR management (Rodríguez-Sánchez, González-Torres, Montero-Navarro, & Gallego-Losada, 2020). The hardest problem in the business world today is employee turnover (Thamrin & Riyanto, 2020). According to a survey of 149 managers in Spanish SMEs conducted by Behraves, Tanova, and Abubakar (2020), a primary factor in increasing talent retention in SMEs is living according to advantageous and supportive organizational principles for work-life harmony. For the surviving talent in SMEs, it is crucial to establish a balance between work and personal life (Kamalaveni, Ramesh, & Vetrivel, 2019).

Start-ups must focus on job growth to improve employee retention and happiness (Salgado, Flegl, & Fejfarová, 2020). Staff welfare, contentment, and workplace morale may benefit from a balanced work-life with a well-planned work-life balance, lowering employee turnover (Kuranga, 2021). Besides that, according to Kamalaveni et al.

(2019), an SME with a work-life balance culture with flexible working schedules also undoubtedly positively impacts employee retention. But, on the other hand, if the company has long working hours and a heavy workload, the employees will reduce their job satisfaction and commitment to stay with their current employer.

This is because the workers would find it difficult to balance the demands of their personal and family lives, which would prevent them from being effective in their employment. The direction of the personnel and the organization would suffer if work-life balance was neglected (Ricardianto, Ikhsan, Setiawati, & Gugat, 2020). As work-life balance is not merely a factor contributing to talent retention, it has been demonstrated that there is a substantial association between it and talent retention. Employers may be able to attract more talent if their organization is attractive. Therefore, it is important to investigate the relationship between work-life balance and talent retention in Malaysian SMEs' competitive environment.

Hypothesis 3: There is a significant relationship between work-life balance and talent retention in the competitive environment of Malaysian SMEs.

Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual framework adopted in this study.

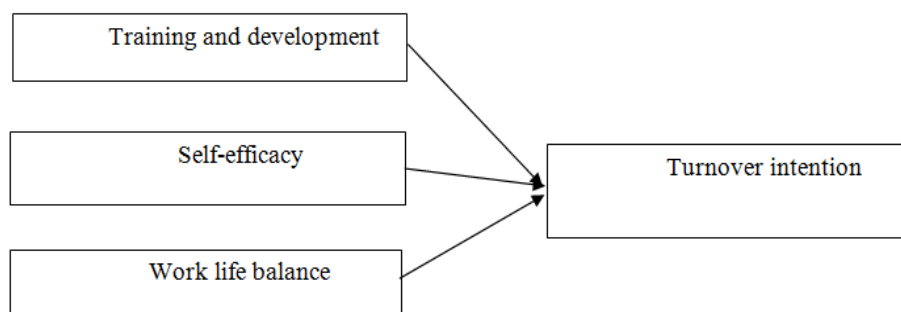


Figure 1. Conceptual framework.

3. METHODS

3.1. Participants and Procedure

Individuals are the unit of analysis in this study. Individuals are the population to be investigated in this study, focusing on talent retention in Malaysian SMEs. As a result, the unit of analysis for this study is the individual rather than the organization. The tool used for data collection was questionnaires distributed to the employees of Malaysian SMEs to determine the determinants that influence talent retention. A self-administrated questionnaire was circulated through social media platforms like WhatsApp, WeChat, Facebook, and email to employees of Malaysian SMEs for data collection purposes. In this study's data analysis for partial least square-structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM), SMART Partial Least Square (PLS) 3 was used. In addition, Cohen's Power analysis is used in determining the sample size of a study. According to Cohen (1992), the sample size is based on the maximum number of arrows pointing at a PLS path model construct. It is essential in designing a study to determine the sample size because N is one of the critical determinants of statistical power (Day Ashley, Hedges, Waring, & Coe, 2021). Statistical power is the probability of detecting an effect in the population (Hair Jr et al., 2021). If statistical power is not sufficient, one risks the possibility of inaccurately concluding that there is no effect on the population (Day Ashley et al., 2021).

For Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) Table 1 shows the sample sizes that should be used to get an 80% power level at different significance levels and minimum R-squared (R^2) values. The table helps to determine the appropriate sample size based on the number of arrows (indicators or items) pointing at a construct in their PLS-SEM model. The first column indicates the maximum number of arrows (indicators) pointing at a construct in the model, ranging from 2 to 10. The subsequent columns represent different significance levels (1%, 5%, and 10%) and minimum R-squared values (0.10, 0.25, 0.50, and 0.75). The values in the

table indicate the recommended sample size for each combination of arrows, significance level, and minimum R-squared value.

In general, the table provides guidance on selecting an appropriate sample size for a PLS-SEM study based on the complexity of the model (number of indicators) and the desired level of statistical power and significance. It helps to ensure that the sample size is sufficient to detect meaningful relationships between constructs in the model. The table can be used as a reference to determine the required sample size for their specific PLS-SEM analysis, considering the factors of model complexity, desired statistical power, and significance level.

Table 1. Sample size recommendation in PLS-SEM for a statistical power of 80%.

Maximum number of arrows pointing at a construct	Significance Level											
	1%				5%				10%			
	Minimum R ²				Minimum R ²				Minimum R ²			
	0.10	0.25	0.50	0.75	0.10	0.25	0.50	0.75	0.10	0.25	0.50	0.75
2	158	75	47	38	110	52	33	26	88	41	26	21
3	176	84	53	42	124	59	38	30	100	48	30	25
4	191	91	58	46	137	65	42	33	111	53	34	27
5	202	98	62	50	147	70	45	36	120	58	37	30
6	217	103	66	53	157	75	48	39	128	62	40	32
7	228	109	69	56	166	80	51	41	136	66	42	35
8	238	114	73	59	174	84	54	44	143	69	45	37
9	247	119	76	62	181	88	57	46	150	73	47	39
10	256	123	79	64	189	91	59	48	156	76	49	41

Source: Cohen (1992).

Due to time constraints, this study is based on the non-probability of sampling processes. Nonprobability sampling has four (4) common methods: convenience, judgmental, stratified, and snowball sampling (Bougie & Sekaran, 2019). This study is a convenient sampling method in which units of analysis that are easy for the researcher to reach are chosen. Furthermore, this method is suitable for a large population, requiring less time and money. It is easily available because, with the permission provided, a convenience sample was employed when the need for speed or other considerations overrode the need for generalizability.

The study's questionnaire will include three sections: one on demographic information, one on talent retention as the dependent variable (DV), and one on independent variables (IVs) such as training and development, self-efficacy, and work-life balance. Table 2 below contains a reference to the questionnaire.

Table 2. Questionnaire design.

Section	Variable	Item	Source	Adapted/Adopted
A	Demographic profile	4	The demographic profile collects and analyses data about the general characteristics of specific populations (Ismael et al., 2021). In addition, it allows researchers to gain background information about the respondents.	
B (DV)	Talent retention	5	Rubcumin (2018) and Berhane (2019)	Adapted
C (IVs)	Training & development	4	Zemburuka and Dangarembizi (2020) and Nandi, Khan, Qureshi, and Ghias (2020)	Adapted
	Self-efficacy	4	Stephens and Huaibing (2018) and Vilayil (2021)	Adapted
	Work life balance	4	Al Kabir and Tirno (2008) and Rubcumin (2018)	Adapted

4. DATA ANALYSIS

Table 3 highlights the response rate of 92.2%. A total of 180 sets of questionnaires were distributed. According to Cohen (1992), SMART PLS requires 59 respondents for the minimum number needed to identify R2 values of at least 5% probability error and 80% statistical power for the conceptual framework of this project. Therefore, the researcher distributed about 180 questionnaires to respondents but was only able to receive 166 questionnaires.

Table 3. Summary of questionnaire distribution.

Determined sample size (Cohen, 1992)	Total questionnaire distributed	Total questionnaire received	Total usable questionnaire	Total unusable questionnaire	Response rate percentage
59	180	166	166	0	92.2%

4.1. Descriptive Statistics

The demographic data is collected from respondents' demographic information, such as gender, race, age, education level, and occupation. Table 4 presents the summary of the respondents' profiles. Table shows that 87 (52.4%) male and 79 (47.6%) female respondents participated in the survey. The participants include Malay, Chinese, and Indian, representing 31.3%, 48.2%, and 20.5%, respectively. The most respondents are between the ages of 18 and 29, who make up 36.2% of the total, and those between the ages of 30 and 39, who have 56 respondents (33.7%). Next are respondents, with 22.3% aged between 40 and 49. Finally, only 13 respondents are aged between 50 and 59 (7.8%). The education level in the questionnaire shows that 85 respondents are bachelor's degree holders (51.2%). In addition, 34 respondents are at the Diploma level (20.5%), 29 respondents are post-graduate (17.5%), and 19 respondents are at the high school level or below (10.8%). In addition, most of the respondents work as private sector employees, representing 47%. Next, 39.2% of the respondents were professionals (lawyers, accountants, academicians, etc.), and 22 respondents were self-employed (13.3%). Only 1 person works with others. The demographic information collected showed that the respondents were the intended targeted respondents per the current project requirements, including all employees working in Malaysian SMEs. Hence, the usable questionnaires are ready for tabulation to prepare for subsequent statistical analyses.

Table 4. Demographic profile of respondents.

Demographic	Classification	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	87	52.4
	Female	79	47.6
	Total	166	100
Race	Malay	52	31.3
	Chinese	80	48.2
	Indian	34	20.5
	Total	166	100
Age	18 – 29	60	36.2
	30 – 39	56	33.7
	40 – 49	37	22.3
	50 – 59	13	7.8
	Total	166	100
Education level	Post-graduate	29	17.5
	Bachelor's degree	85	51.2
	Diploma	34	20.5
	High school and below	18	10.8
	Total	166	100
Occupation	Professional (Lawyer, accountant, academician, etc.)	65	39.2
	Private sector employee	78	47.0
	Self-employed	22	13.3
	Others	1	0.5
	Total	166	100

4.2. Reliability and Validity Test

The internal consistency and reliability of the measurement model are shown in Table 5. The composite reliability values show high values such as 0.826 (training and development), 0.903 (self-efficacy), 0.944 (work-life balance), and 0.932 (talent retention). Table 5 also shows the convergent validity results assessed by the AVE values. The AVE values for the four (4) variables were above 0.50 thresholds (Hair Jr et al., 2021). The AVE values are high, which are 0.544 (training and development), 0.701 (self-efficacy), 0.810 (work-life balance), and 0.774 (talent retention). At the indicator level, the indicator loadings in Table 5 show that one loading is slightly below the 0.70 threshold value, which is TD4 (0.686). According to Hair Jr et al. (2021), the indicators with an outer loading of 0.40 to 0.70 may be retained because the elimination of the indicators may affect the content validity of the construct. As for this study, the AVE value for training and development is 0.544, and the composite reliability of 0.826 (refer to Table 5) is considered acceptable. Furthermore, according to Mehmetoglu and Venturini (2021), indicator loadings between 0.40 and 0.70 should be examined. If the indicators are important enough for the study, the researcher can keep them even if the item loading is below 0.70. For this study, the researcher decided to keep this indicator (TD4) slightly below 0.70.

Table 5. Result summary for the reflective measurement model.

Latent variable	Indicator	Loading	Indicator reliability	Composite reliability (> 0.708)	AVE (> 0.50)	Discriminant analysis
Training and development	TD1	0.756	0.572	0.826	0.544	Yes
	TD2	0.768	0.590			
	TD3	0.737	0.543			
	TD4	0.686	0.471			
Self-efficacy	SE1	0.825	0.681	0.903	0.701	Yes
	SE2	0.922	0.850			
	SE3	0.864	0.746			
	SE4	0.725	0.526			
Work-life balance	WL1	0.889	0.790	0.944	0.810	Yes
	WL2	0.884	0.781			
	WL3	0.907	0.823			
	WL4	0.918	0.843			
Talent retention	TR1	0.894	0.799	0.932	0.774	Yes
	TR2	0.898	0.806			
	TR3	0.872	0.760			
	TR4	0.855	0.731			

Table 6. Discriminant validity – Fornell-Larcker criterion.

Variables/Model constructs	Self-efficacy	Talent retention	Training and development	Work-life balance
Self-efficacy	-	0.145	0.247	0.048
Talent retention	0.837	-	0.241	0.472
Training and development	0.880	0.880	-	0.280
Work-life balance	0.737	0.241	0.737	-

The Fornell-Larcker Criterion, cross-loadings, and Heterotrait Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) were adopted to assess the discriminant validity at the construct level. Table 6 reveals that each latent variable’s AVE value is greater than the latent variable’s highest squared correlation over the other latent variable. The results show that each of the above latent variables has a higher construct variance with its assigned indicators than with any other latent variable. This shows that the discriminant validity is high at the construct level. In this table, each cell represents the HTMT value between the respective constructs. The diagonal elements (top-left to bottom-

right) are not applicable and can be left blank or marked with "-". This table provides a visual representation of the discriminant validity assessment using the HTMT method for your variables or model constructs.

Table 7. Discriminant validity – Cross Loadings.

Construct	Self-efficacy	Talent retention	Training and development	Work-life balance
SE1	0.825	0.093	0.166	0.046
SE2	0.922	0.162	0.264	0.055
SE3	0.864	0.112	0.191	0.025
SE4	0.725	0.006	0.238	0.058
TD1	0.078	0.155	0.756	0.132
TD2	0.179	0.179	0.768	0.171
TD3	0.146	0.192	0.737	0.166
TD4	0.314	0.179	0.686	0.347
TR1	0.109	0.894	0.210	0.439
TR2	0.111	0.898	0.237	0.385
TR3	0.189	0.872	0.234	0.448
TR4	0.092	0.855	0.161	0.383
WL1	0.071	0.358	0.211	0.889
WL2	0.001	0.466	0.228	0.884
WL3	0.043	0.436	0.235	0.907
WL4	0.066	0.426	0.329	0.918

Table 7 also shows that the loadings of each indicator on its assigned latent variable are more significant (numbers in bold) than all of its cross-loadings. The discriminant validity at the indicator level was established. Another new method used to test discriminant validity is the HTMT. Table 8 below shows discriminant validity by using HTMT. The HTMT shall be less than 1.00 (Roemer, Schuberth, & Henseler, 2021). The figures in Table 8 show discriminant validity – HTMT, and all ratios are less than the 1.00 threshold value. Therefore, it suggests that the ratios are discriminant.

Table 8. Discriminant validity – HTMT.

Construct	Self-efficacy	Talent retention	Training and development	Work-life balance
Self-efficacy	-	-	-	-
Talent retention	0.135	-	-	-
Training and development	0.312	0.295	-	-
Work-life balance	0.071	0.510	0.339	-

In this table, the HTMT values represent the Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio of correlations. This ratio compares the correlations between constructs (diagonal elements) with the correlations of constructs with each other (off-diagonal elements) to assess discriminant validity. The values above the diagonal should be less than 0.85 to indicate acceptable discriminant validity.

Researchers must check the structural model for collinearity prior to evaluating it. The structural model's path coefficient estimate is based on regressions between each endogenous latent variable and its related preceding constructs, which explains why (Hair Jr et al., 2021). Just as in a regular multiple regression, the path coefficients can show bias if the estimation involves significant levels of collinearity among the predictor constructs (Mehmetoglu & Venturini, 2021). In PLS-SEM, to assess collinearity, the researcher needs to apply the measures of Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values. The researcher needs to examine each set of predictor constructs separately for each subpart of the structural model. Since the inner VIF values in Table 9 are less than 5, collinearity is not present, according to the collinearity assessment.

Table 9. Inner VIF values.

Construct	Self-efficacy	Talent retention	Training and development	Work-life balance
Self-efficacy	-	1.066	-	-
Talent retention	0.135	-	1.154	-
Training and development	-	0.295	-	1.085
Work-life balance	0.071	0.510	0.339	-

From Table 9, the collinearity assessment found that the inner VIF values are less than 5; therefore, collinearity does not exist. In this table, the Inner VIF values represent the Variance Inflation Factor for each pair of constructs. The diagonal cells are left empty as they represent the same construct, and VIF values between the same construct are always 1. The off-diagonal cells indicate the VIF values between different constructs, indicating the level of multicollinearity between them.

Following a reliable and valid measurement model, the structural model was assessed. This involved examining the model's predictive capabilities and the relationship between the constructs (Hair Jr et al., 2021). Figure 2 shows the results of the structural model of the present study.

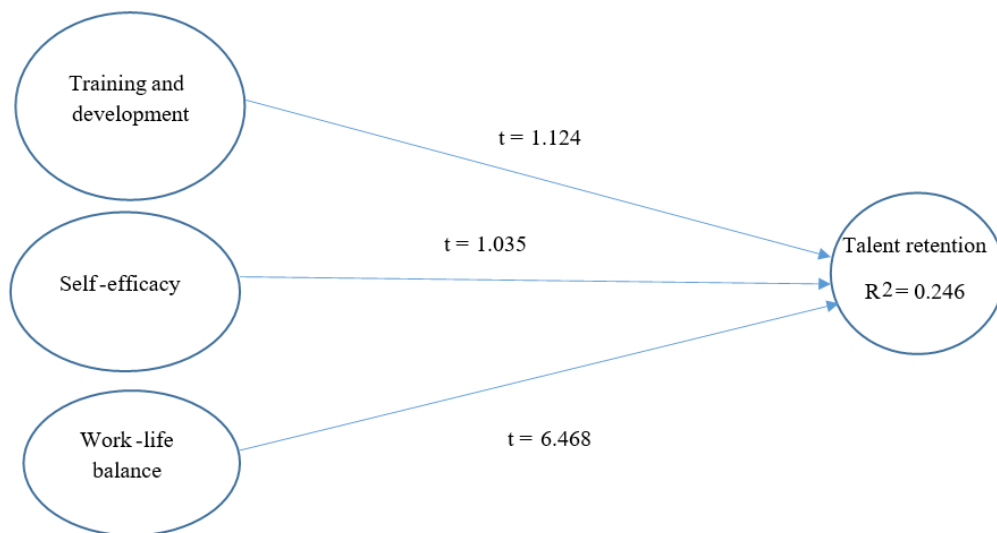


Figure 2. Results of the structural model.

The R² values of the endogenous latent variables are available in the PLS Algorithm default report (Mehmetoglu & Venturini, 2021). Figure 2 and Table 10 show the level of R².

Table 10. The level of R².

Variable	R ²
Talent retention	0.246

Table 10 above shows the R² values for talent retention (0.246). R² values range from 0 to 1, with higher levels indicating higher levels of predictive accuracy. Therefore, the model moderately explained the endogenous latent variables (Samat, Awang, Hussin, & Naw, 2020). The changes in R² values were calculated to identify the predictors' effect size (f²). The results show that the effect size (f²) ranges from 0.010 to 0.238 (refer to Table 11), indicating the presence of small to medium effects (Mehmetoglu & Venturini, 2021). Specifically, training and development have a small effect size (f² = 0.010) on talent retention, followed by self-efficacy with f² = 0.013 on talent retention. Work-life balance has a medium effect size (f² = 0.238) on talent retention.

Table 11. The f^2 effect size.

Construct	Self-efficacy	Talent retention	Training and development	Work-life balance
Self-efficacy	-	0.013	-	-
Talent retention	0.023	-	0.010	-
Training and development	0.015	0.010	-	0.026
Work-life balance	0.238	-	0.015	-

Following the research framework, the study tested a significant relationship between work-life balance and talent retention in the competitive environment of Malaysian SMEs. However, training and development and self-efficacy have no significant relationship with talent retention. As shown in the table, the f^2 effect size indicates the practical significance of the relationship between each pair of constructs. The diagonal cells are left empty as they represent the same construct. The off-diagonal cells represent the f^2 effect size between different constructs, indicating the strength of the relationship between them in terms of practical significance.

Table 12. Significant testing results of the hypotheses.

Hypotheses	Path coefficients	T value	Significance level	P values	95% confidence intervals
H1	SE -- TR	1.035	NS	0.301	(-0.242, 0.176)
H2	TD -- TR	1.124	NS	0.261	(-0.264, 0.056)
H3	WL -- TR	6.468	**	0.000	(-0.563, -0.296)

Note: NS = Not significant. ** $p < 0.05$.

The rule of thumb is that the t-value should be above 1.96, showing a significant relationship at p less than 0.05 or a confidence level of 95%. The bootstrapping results in Table 12 above, self-efficacy \rightarrow talent retention (t-value is 1.035, $p > 0.05$), and training and development \rightarrow talent retention (t-value is 1.124, $p > 0.05$), are statistically not significant. The standardized direct relationship estimates for work-life balance (t-value is 6.468, $p < 0.05$) indicate a significant and direct relationship between the exogenous and endogenous variable (refer to Table 12).

Overall, the results of the hypothesis testing show that not all the paths were statistically significant at the $p < 0.05$ level, as shown in Table 12. Therefore, hypothesis 1 states that a significant relationship between training and development and talent retention in the competitive environment of Malaysian SMEs is not supported. This is because the path coefficients were not statistically significant for the relationship between training and development and talent retention (t-value is 1.035, $p > 0.05$, refer to Table 12). The path coefficients were statistically insignificant for the relationship between self-efficacy on talent retention in the competitive environment of Malaysian SMEs (t-value is 1.124, $p > 0.05$, refer to Table 12). Hence, the empirical evidence does not support hypothesis 2. Hypothesis 3 states that there is a significant relationship between the work-life balances and talent retention in the competitive environment of Malaysian SMEs. The path coefficients were statistically significant as work-life balance positively relates to talent retention (t-value is 6.468, $p < 0.05$, refer to Table 12).

In conclusion, from the various statistical analyses carried out and explained, the three (3) primary hypotheses tested showed that empirical evidence only supported one (1) of the hypotheses.

5. DISCUSSION

5.1. Relationships between Training and Development and Talent Retention

This study rejected Hypothesis 1's assertion that training and development have a strong positive link with talent retention. As a result, these results conflict with those of the investigations by Michailova and Ott (2019), Shani and Senthilkumar (2020), and Oludayo et al. (2018). The result, however, is in line with earlier research by Fletcher, Alfes, and Robinson (2018), who discovered that training and development do not directly contribute to talent retention. Instead, the authors' data showed that work attitudes mediated the relationship between training

and development and talent retention. According to the authors, talent retention should therefore encompass a wider spectrum of work attitudes that emphasize positive kinds of effects.

This study is also consistent with the study by [Gan and Yusof \(2019\)](#), who reviewed articles ranging from 2008 to 2018 on the relationship between training and development and talent retention. The review and past studies found that the relationship between training and development and talent retention among employees is not consistent. The management and non-management teams were the two categories of employees participating in the studies. The results from the two sectors differed; the non-management team showed no significant link with the variables, but the management team showed a strong relationship. Distinct staff groupings might produce diverse results in the relationship.

This finding aligns with [Ju and Li \(2019\)](#). They stated that there is a negative relationship between on-the-job training, off-the-job training, distance training, job tenure, and education-job and skills-job matches with talent retention. According to the authors, employees do not value the training in the company, and they choose to leave the company even though the companies provide training. Furthermore, according to [Susomrith, Coetzer, and Ampofo \(2019\)](#), large companies have more bargaining power in the labor market as compared to SMEs. Big companies are well-resourced and provide better career advancement.

[Amen, Sumayya, and Butt \(2021\)](#) made a significant but unfavorable association between training and development and talent retention, which was a unique discovery. This is presumably because skilled employees have improved their abilities and are meant to hunt for better companies to work with, which has decreased the retention rate. Contrary to the hypothesis, based on the findings of this study, it is clear that talent and development do not impact talent retention.

5.2. Relationships between Self-Efficacy and Talent Retention

This study did not support Hypothesis 2, that there is a relationship between self-efficacy and talent retention in the competitive environment of Malaysian SMEs. In other words, self-efficacy is not an essential factor affecting talent retention. This finding is consistent with the previous studies by [Boon, Den Hartog, and Lepak \(2019\)](#), who mentioned that self-efficacy has a negative effect on talent retention. This is supported by [Yeves, Bargsted, and Ramírez-Vielma \(2019\)](#) and [Yoo and Cho \(2020\)](#).

[Hsieh, Hurst, Jones, and Klenow \(2019\)](#) stated that employees with high levels of self-efficacy tend to interpret tasks and social characteristics as a challenge that promotes their attitudes and work behaviors in SMEs. The authors added that this might negatively affect talent retention because if the employees do not find any challenging tasks and social characteristics in SMEs, they will choose to leave the company. Furthermore, according to [Bandura \(1986\)](#), a high level of self-efficacy encourages employees to be in charge of their destinies and achieve their goals.

According to [Shao, Guo, Yue, and Zhang \(2022\)](#), employees with high levels of self-efficacy are willing to set high goals, are more likely to persist until difficulties or challenges are overcome, and are not afraid of failure. The authors added that if employees have a higher sense of self-efficacy for their future, they will have a healthier psychological and physical status and develop higher expectations and achievement motivations for themselves. Thus, if SMEs are not providing any challenging and innovative goals for these employees, they will tend to leave the SMEs ([Afzal, Arshad, Saleem, & Farooq, 2019](#); [Albrecht & Marty, 2020](#); [Khan, Khan, Moin, & Pitafi, 2021](#)).

The above aligns with [Gao et al. \(2022\)](#), who found that self-efficacy influences learning and the effort employees exert on the work. Employees with high self-efficacy tend to work hard to learn to perform new tasks. This is because they are more confident that their efforts will be successful. According to the authors, if SME does not provide the opportunity to learn new tasks, the employees will have thought or planned to leave the company.

In short, self-efficacy is not significantly reducing turnover intention, and self-efficacy is only associated with lower turnover intention when it adds value to the employees ([Stephens & Huaibing, 2018](#)). Thus, based on the findings of this study, self-efficacy does not impact talent retention.

5.3. Relationships between Work-Life Balance and Talent Retention

This study found a significant direct positive relationship between work-life balance and talent retention in the competitive environment of Malaysian SMEs (*Hypothesis 3*). Furthermore, it revealed the importance of work-life balance in affecting employees' talent retention in Malaysian SMEs; therefore, SMEs or the human resources department (HRD) should pay attention to this matter.

According to *Usmani (2021)*, work-life balance helps to maintain employees' mental health. If the employees face mental health issues, they will face depression, insomnia, anxiety, and physical health issues, which include chronic pains, heart troubles, and hypertension. Burnout will also happen if the employees suffer too much stress over a long period of time. As a result, the importance of work-life balance in competitive Malaysian SMEs should be stressed since it plays an essential role in talent retention. In short, the statistical output shows that work-life balance can directly impact talent retention. This finding is consistent with previous studies, which revealed that work-life balance serves a primary role in improving talent retention in SMEs (*Behraves et al., 2020; Kamalaveni et al., 2019; Kuranga, 2021*).

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

Work-life balance has been determined to have a significant relationship, which impacts talent retention in competitive Malaysian SMEs. To keep talents motivated in the SMEs, work-life balance should be offered. The SMEs can provide flexible working hours, child care, maternity, and parental leave (*Usmani, 2021*). Besides this, balancing talented employees' work time and tasks can allow them to spend more time with their families and friends (*Ehido, Awang, Halim, & Ibeabuchi, 2020*). On the other hand, workloads and extended working hours will cause stress and mental stress, which tend to impact talent's work performance and retention (*Shahani, Nawaz, & Tahir, 2020*). According to *Kamalaveni et al. (2019)*, the HRD of SMEs can use some talent retention strategies that help to improve the work-life balance between their personal and work lives, which include the following:

- Allowing for flexible working arrangements.
- Allowing flexible working hours.
- Providing further educational opportunities.
- Provide enough breaks, or leave.
- Personnel incentives.
- Inviting employees' families to staff functions.
- Benefits for health and wellness.
- Help employees achieve personal goals.

Work-life balance is undeniably one of the essential aspects impacting talent retention. Younger generations value work-life balance and are more likely to work with greater flexibility (*Vyas, 2022*). Nowadays, work flexibility is frequently cited as a motivation for an employee to leave a job in search of a new one. As a result, HRD must be aware of relevant action plans that must consider the importance of work flexibility, especially in competitive SMEs. Employees are entitled to a healthy lifestyle, which can only be attained when work and personal lives are balanced (*Rodríguez-Sánchez et al., 2020*). With this, the employees will be happy working and less likely to leave the company.

On the other hand, it is necessary to make better use of work-life balance alternatives like job sharing, flex time, and breaks so that employees feel that the SME is helping them balance their personal and professional lives. In addition, it becomes necessary to offer job-sharing possibilities alongside paid and unpaid career pauses (*Ansari & Garg, 2020*). Frequent exercise, meditation, and other soft skill practices might be started to improve the employees' emotional stability. The study offers fresh perspectives and new lines of inquiry into work-life balance strategies. SMEs shall focus on other determinants that can increase the retention rate among skilled workers rather than the determinants of training and development to retain talent (*Amen et al., 2021*). For example, as

mentioned above, other determinants, such as work-life balance. Besides that, SMEs shall provide some challenging tasks, innovation goals, and social characteristics to the employees for talent retention purposes (Hsieh et al., 2019). The authors mentioned that employees tend to see their tasks and social characteristics as challenging with high self-efficacy. Challenging tasks require the employees to put in more effort and determination to complete the tasks, which will lessen the chance for the employees to leave the SMEs (Khan et al., 2021). Furthermore, innovation goals should be exciting and visionary in the eyes of employees in SMEs. This includes goals not seen before, measurable at least once a year, the ability to deliver value to the employees, and customer-focused goals (Albrecht & Marty, 2020). Social characteristics cover the employee or a group of employees, which contribute to the specification of the population to which the employee belongs (Afzal et al., 2019). This includes the language spoken, gender, ethnic status, etc. According to Gao et al. (2022), SMEs shall also provide the chance to learn opportunities to the employees, as high-self-efficacy employees tend to work hard to learn to perform new tasks. Furthermore, the authors mentioned that SMEs could allow employees to expand their skills and knowledge in different areas, maintain a pathway for personal and professional growth opportunities, promote trust among employees, and keep up-to-date information in their roles to complete their tasks.

Funding: This study received no specific financial support.

Institutional Review Board Statement: The Ethical Committee of the INTI International University, Malaysia has granted approval for this study.

Transparency: The authors state that the manuscript is honest, truthful, and transparent, that no key aspects of the investigation have been omitted, and that any differences from the study as planned have been clarified. This study followed all writing ethics.

Competing Interests: The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

Authors' Contributions: All authors contributed equally to the conception and design of the study. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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