

The Psychological Contract and Student Retention: A Framework for Sustainable Engagement in Higher Education

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Abstract: Malaysia is among the leading developing countries in higher education. Although many efforts have been implemented and planned to make Malaysia one of the top countries in education systems, there are still a few problems that have not been completely solved. One key challenge is student retention in higher education institutions. The purpose of this study is to investigate the relationship between psychological contract and student retention. This study adopts a quantitative research design, employing probability sampling. The development of research questions has been made using the theory of psychological contract (relational contract, balanced contract, transactional contract, transitional contract) and student retention. These 4 types of psychological contract are crucial in understanding student retention as they reflect the nature of students' perceived relationship with the institution, influencing their level of engagement, satisfaction and likelihood to persist or withdraw. The collected data were analysed using various statistical methods to examine the determinants influencing student retention decisions. This research offers valuable insights for academic staff and faculty members aiming to enhance student retention strategies and promote sustained engagement in higher education. Preliminary findings indicate a significant relationship between psychological contracts and student retention, specifically in public higher education institutions in Malaysia.

Keywords: *Psychological contract, student retention, university student*

1. Introduction and Background

Student retention reflects an institution's capacity to facilitate students' completion of academic programs, contributing to educational success and national economic development. Higher education may help students achieve workforce readiness, critical thinking skills, and overall community development (Beenen & Arbaugh, 2019). However, student retention has become an escalating concern in Malaysia, exacerbated by disruptions from the COVID-19 pandemic, which led to increased student withdrawals. The pandemic has significantly changed educational settings, as the shift to online learning has affected student participation in class and retention in their study programs. The social integration between students has been disrupted which is an important element in student retention resulting in dissatisfaction that led students to withdraw from their academic programs (Pather & Booi, 2019). In Japan, the Ministry of Education indicated that 11,852 students departed from the university in 2021, with 701 of them citing the pandemic as the main reason for their withdrawal decision (Kakuchi, 2021). Similarly, a study involving 1,500 students at Arizona State University revealed that 11% had dropped out of classes due to challenges they were facing with online learning (Aucejo et al., 2020).

Student retention has become an issue in Malaysia especially in the post-pandemic era, Statistics showed a rising number of students' withdrawal especially at the tertiary education level. Public universities in Malaysia contributed more than 30,000 students who withdrew between 2020 and 2021, with UiTM being one of the most impacted institutions (Kementerian Pendidikan Tinggi, 2021). Even with the return to face-to-face classes, retention rates still haven't bounced back to their original number which underscoring retention issues in student involvement. Studies indicate that work-related stress and a lack of social integration play a role in students' choices to withdraw from the university (Haverila et al., 2020; Verulava & Jorbenadze, 2022). Previous studies on student retention have primarily centered on academic achievement, institutional assistance, and financial support (Nidzam et al., 2022). Yet, few studies have investigated student retention from the perspective of psychological contract theory.

Considering the limited number of studies regarding psychological contracts and student retention, this study seeks to examine how psychological contracts can affect student retention at UiTM. Institutions can create strategies to improve retention and students' academic achievement by comprehending how students'

expectations match with their university experiences. Psychological contract refers to a person's perception of reciprocal responsibilities between one party and another party (Rousseau, 1989). It shows underlying expectations between students and the institutions that are essential in influencing student involvement and dedication. In the higher education context, the psychological contract encompasses students' expectations of their academic journey which includes effective instruction, social interaction, and their readiness for careers (Itzkovich, 2021). When these expectations are not fulfilled such as having insufficient instructor assistance for their study, minimal classroom engagement between them and academic staff, or the absence of job prospects, students might experience disconnection and ultimately withdraw from the institution (Azmat & Ahmad, 2022; Mathew & Chung, 2020).

Typically, a psychological contract signifies the shared expectations between workers and employers, whereby incentives like job stability and equitable pay establish responsibilities for employees to show commitment, loyalty, and dedication (Battisti et al., 2007). This corresponds with social exchange theory, suggesting that favorable employee attitudes and actions arise from mutual relationships (Gorde, 2019). Psychological contracts rely on unspoken agreements, which makes them vulnerable to violations and differing interpretations (Chaudhry & Tekleab, 2013; Herriot et al., 1997). Though traditionally applied to workplaces, psychological contract theory is increasingly relevant in educational settings. Students develop expectations regarding faculty commitment, lesson quality, and institutional support. (Itzkovich, 2021; Yucel-Aybat et al., 2018). Student retention is associated with the satisfaction of psychological contracts, as unfulfilled expectations may result in students disengaging from their studies (Barnhill et al., 2013; Bordia et al., 2019). Faculty play a crucial role in promoting student satisfaction by making sure that institutional commitments meet students' expectations. Organizations that emphasize meeting psychological contracts can boost student trust, involvement, and foster enduring retention. A breach of the psychological contract can happen when these expectations are not fulfilled, impacting student engagement and satisfaction (Robinson & Morrison, 2000). There is a scarcity of studies on psychological contracts within higher education, indicating a deficiency in the literature (Koskina, 2013).

2. Literature Review

Student retention and psychological contract: The phenomenon of student retention has been extensively researched at various educational tiers (Aljohani, 2016; Boyd et al., 2022; Chen et al., 2010; Christian et al., 2020). Higher education, especially community colleges, has encountered ongoing difficulties in keeping students enrolled (Monaghan & Sommers, 2022). Data from the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center (2021) show variations in retention rates across the years, highlighting significant drops in community colleges. The shift to online learning poses during further challenge to student retention (Coman et al., 2020; Fan et al., 2023; Glazier, 2020; Pham et al., 2021). Many students struggled due to limited interaction with faculty and peers, leading to lower retention rates compared to face-to-face learning. (Glazier & Harris, 2021). Effective communication and faculty support were identified as critical factors in promoting student retention. (Alawamleh et al., 2022; Haverila et al., 2020; Sümer & Yüner, 2021).

Tinto's (1975) model of student retention highlights the importance of academic and social integration in determining whether students retain or withdraw. Academic integration is measured by grades and intellectual development, while social integration includes peer interactions and faculty engagement. A lack of integration can lead to disengagement and eventual withdrawal (Nicoletti, 2019; Samoilă & Vrabie, 2023). While extensively studied in workplace settings (Gulzar et al., 2021; Ngoben et al., 2022; Yu, 2022) Little research has explored its role in student retention. In educational contexts, students form psychological contracts based on expectations of faculty engagement, instructional quality and institutional support. When faculty members fail to meet students' expectations, dissatisfaction increases, negatively impacting retention. (Ericksen, 2022; Henry, 2020). Conversely, fulfilling students' psychological contracts by ensuring clear communication, academic support, and engagement can enhance retention (James, 2022; Lobos et al., 2022).

Existing literature, such as Barnhill et al. (2013), Bordia et al. (2019), Haski-Leventhal et al. (2020), Itzkovich (2021), and Koskina (2013), emphasizes that psychological contracts in educational settings are just as critical as those in organizational environments. This is because students, much like employees, seek the fulfillment of their expectations by the institution they are part of. The psychological contract in education is typically formed

based on students' perceptions of what they are owed by academic staff and the institution, be it academic support, guidance, feedback, or fairness in teaching and assessment. Barnhill et al. (2013) validated the presence of such contracts, showing that students perceive their interactions with academic staff as reciprocal relationships based on the fulfilment of certain academic and relational expectations.

When these expectations are not fulfilled, the psychological contract is viewed as violated, potentially leading to a loss of trust between students and faculty. This violation impacts not only the emotional ties students have with the institution but can also affect their motivation and dedication to academics, potentially resulting in their departure. As noted by various scholars, the violation of the psychological contract reduces students' confidence in instructors and can lead to feelings of isolation or disconnection. (Itzkovich, 2021; Robinson & Morrison, 2000). Consequently, student retention is closely linked to how effectively the institution meets its psychological commitments. Faculty members, specifically, are crucial in influencing these views by providing ongoing support, being responsive, and employing inclusive teaching methods. A healthy and positive psychological contract can enhance student satisfaction, encourage a greater sense of belonging, and elevate the chances of students persisting in their academic path at the same institution.

Psychological contract in educational settings: The idea of the psychological contract was initially introduced by Argyris (1960) in the work environment, yet it has slowly gained significance in educational settings too. The psychological contract was originally used to examine relationships between employees and employers; nonetheless, scholars have recently broadened its application to investigate the expectations between students and faculty in higher education settings. (Itzkovich, 2021). Students frequently arrive at university with unspoken expectations, including organized lesson presentation, reciprocal respect, and individualized assistance. When these expectations are fulfilled, students establish a psychological agreement that leads them to commit more to their academic duties, while academic staff, in turn, are expected to maintain teaching quality and interact genuinely with them. (Liao, 2013). In this context, psychological contracts represent students' views on the commitments made by institutions in return for their effort and financial investment in tuition. (Yucel-Aybat et al., 2018). This interaction necessitates reciprocal comprehension and collaboration to preserve equilibrium, particularly in substantial organizations where individualization may be difficult. (Bordia et al., 2010).

But, if students feel that their academic expectations are unmet—like insufficient engagement or disregard from faculty—they might encounter a violation of the psychological contract, resulting in feelings of disappointment or distrust. (Itzkovich, 2021). Robinson and Morrison (2000) characterize this breach as not merely a failure of institutional duties but also as an emotional infringement that impacts student motivation. Although psychological contracts have been extensively investigated in organizational and military settings (Kiili, 2016; Soares & Mosquera, 2019) and are gradually receiving attention in healthcare and service industries (Grama, 2020; Welander et al., 2020), a significant gap persists in research related to higher education. For example, existing studies have focused on conducting research regarding the psychological contract in educational settings among student volunteers. (Haski-Leventhal et al., 2020), international students (Bordia et al., 2019), and student-athletes (Barnhill & Turner, 2015); however, only a few and limited studies examined psychological contracts concerning student retention (Barnhill et al., 2013). This research addresses this gap by highlighting how breaches of students' psychological contracts can lower their trust and further raise withdrawal risks. Meeting these psychological expectations is essential for enhancing retention. Academic personnel have an essential role, and their ongoing dedication to connect and address student needs can greatly enhance institutional commitment and satisfaction.

Social exchange theory and psychological contract: In a psychological contract, the rewards offered by employers—such as job security, fair compensation, and career growth—establish expectations from employees to reciprocate with loyalty, commitment, and consistent performance. This mutual understanding is not formalized in a written contract but exists as a set of perceived obligations between both parties. The existence of such expectations creates additional responsibility for employers to provide a supportive and fair working environment (Battisti et al., 2007). When these expectations are met, it fosters a positive working relationship, contributing to organizational success through enhanced employee satisfaction, engagement, and productivity (Gorde, 2019). Chaudhry and Tekleab (2013) describe the psychological contract as a foundation of reciprocal obligations that bind the employer and employee in a continuous cycle of expectations and

contributions. However, because psychological contracts are subjective and vary from person to person, they carry the risk of being unintentionally violated, potentially resulting in disappointment, reduced motivation, or even withdrawal (Herriot et al., 1997). Understanding and managing these perceptions is therefore essential to maintaining a positive and sustainable exchange relationship.

The psychological contract is grounded in Social Exchange Theory, introduced by Blau (1964), posits that human relationships are formed and maintained through reciprocal exchanges of benefits, where individuals seek to maximize rewards and minimize costs. In a psychological contract, the rewards offered by employers—such as job security, fair compensation, and career growth—establish expectations from employees to reciprocate with loyalty, commitment, and consistent performance. This shared understanding exists as a perceived obligation between the two parties but is not documented in a written contract. To foster employee satisfaction, engagement, and productivity, such expectations create additional responsibilities on employers to ensure a supportive and fair working environment (Battisti et al., 2007; Gorde, 2019).

In educational settings, social exchange theory has become more significant for understanding student retention. At the higher education level, students perceive the institution as a collaborator, anticipating faculty assistance, timely feedback, and academic advice in return for their commitment and involvement. (Cook et al., 2013). Trust is essential for the fulfilment of the psychological contract. When the faculty is unresponsive or unreachable for students, they might believe this commitment is not reciprocated which can result in decreased retention rates (Liao, 2013). Students tend to develop a sense of commitment and persist within the institution when this interaction is viewed as fair and balanced. In return, they are expected to commit to the learning program by following academic standards and supporting a constructive learning environment. On the other hand, they might feel disconnected and potentially raise the chances of academic disengagement and withdrawal when they encounter a breach in the psychological contract like insufficient support, unresponsiveness from faculty, or unfulfilled academic needs (Jansson & Wiklund, 2019).

Thus, the perceived fairness and fulfilment of mutual expectations between students and institutions can be explained by social exchange theory which provides a useful framework that can significantly influence students' decisions to stay or leave. Building strong student-institution relationships based on mutual trust and consistent support can therefore enhance retention rates. Student retention can be improved by aligning support systems with student expectations and institutions that recognize the role of the psychological contract in shaping students' academic experience can improve and foster stronger academic integration.

3. Methodology

Quantitative research approach was employed in this study to measure and analyse the relationship between variables. A correlational research design is specifically used to investigate the relationship between the independent variable (psychological contract) and the dependent variable (student retention) without altering the variables. (Cherry, 2023). This study was conducted in an outdoor setting to collect data from students at Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) from various branches in Malaysia to have a genuine interaction. The unit of analysis is on individual students who enrolled in Bachelor's degree programs at UiTM. (DiscoverPhDs, 2020). A cross-sectional study design was used to collect data from a large number of participants at a single point in time. (Thomas, 2020).

A stratified random sampling approach ensures representativeness by dividing participants into subgroups based on key attributes, thereby minimizing selection bias. This method divides the population into subgroups based on relevant attributes, ensuring diversity within the sample. (Fleetwood, 2023; Taherdoost, 2016). The target population consists of UiTM students from five regional divisions:

- Northern (Perak, Perlis, Pulau Pinang, Kedah)
- Central (Selangor)
- Southern (Johor, Melaka, Negeri Sembilan)
- East Coast (Kelantan, Terengganu, Pahang)
- East Malaysia (Sabah, Sarawak)

The sample size represents a subset of the target population selected to ensure meaningful and generalizable findings. A pilot study with university students outside the target population refined research instruments and procedures (Lowe, 2019). Ethical approval from the UiTM Research Ethics Committee was obtained before data collection.

Data collection and data analysis

This study integrates primary and secondary data sources to ensure a comprehensive approach. Structured surveys were distributed via Google Forms, disseminated through UiTM's corporate email, WhatsApp, and other digital platforms. The questionnaire comprised three sections (A, B, and C), designed to assess independent and dependent variables. (Ajayi, 2017).

Data analysis was conducted using SPSS version 29, applying the following statistical methods:

- Descriptive statistics summarized key trends (Kaur et al., 2018).
- Cronbach's Alpha assessed internal consistency and survey reliability (Bonett & Wright, 2015).
- Pearson's correlation coefficient measured the strength and direction of relationships between variables (Schober & Schwarte, 2018).
- Multiple Regression Analysis (MRA) employed to predict the relationship between psychological contracts and student retention (Hair et al., 2010).
- P-values evaluated statistical significance of results, with findings shown in regression tables (Kazuhisa, 2021).

This methodological framework ensures a rigorous analysis, supporting meaningful conclusions about psychological contracts and student retention.

4. Results and Discussion

With the support given from Majlis Perwakilan Pelajar (MPP), this research successfully collected a remarkable valid response (n=352) yielding to 92.15% response rate from UiTM Selangor Branch campuses—Puncak Alam, Shah Alam, and Puncak Perdana. The data collection process took over three months encountering challenges in encouraging student involvement. Despite the initially low participation however, MPP's engagement had significantly contributed to improving respondent involvement and increasing study visibility to take part in the study. Google Forms was chosen as the survey platform because of its user-friendliness, accessibility, and capability to effectively reach respondents. This web-based platform enabled participants to complete the survey at their leisure, leading to an increased response rate

Demographic analysis: The sample consists of 352 respondents, where female participants represent the majority of the respondents (73.0%, n=257), and male respondents only make up 27.0% (n=95). The gender imbalance indicates higher female participation, potentially reflecting broader demographic trends or engagement patterns at UiTM Selangor. The largest age group represented is 21–25 years (64.2%, n=226), followed by 18–20 years (34.1%, n=120). Only 1.7% (n=6) of respondents belong to the 26–30 age category. This distribution suggests that students aged 21–25 were the most engaged, while older students (26–30) had minimal representation, possibly due to academic priorities or time constraints. Regarding campus participation, UiTM Shah Alam contributed the highest responses (48.0%, n=169), followed by UiTM Puncak Alam (41.5%, n=146) and UiTM Puncak Perdana (10.5%, n=37). The variation in response rates across campuses suggests differences in student engagement, accessibility, or institutional outreach efforts.

The sample includes students from 16 faculties, with Applied Sciences and Accountancy yielding the highest participation (each 10.8%, n=38). Lower participation was observed in Dentistry (0.6%, n=2) and Sports Science and Recreation (1.4%, n=5). Early-year students had the highest participation (Part 1: 24.7%, n=87), whereas upper-level students exhibited lower engagement, possibly due to academic workload or survey fatigue.

Reliability analysis: In this study, Cronbach's Alpha was used to assess the internal consistency of the variables, following the guidelines established by Sekaran and Bougie (2016). Cronbach's Alpha is a reliability coefficient that assesses the internal consistency of items within a construct, ensuring that they measure the

intended concept cohesively. A Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.70 or greater is considered acceptable, while values near 0.80 or higher suggest strong reliability. The results of the reliability analysis of this study indicate that every variable shows strong reliability, with one variable reflecting an exceptionally high Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.969, indicating excellent internal consistency. The other variables like student retention (0.876), relational contract (0.867), transactional contract (0.825), and transitional contract (0.861) also show high reliability, verifying the internal consistency of the questionnaire items. The findings confirm the reliability of all survey items, validating their suitability for assessing student retention and psychological contracts. Consequently, the instrument used in this study can be deemed statistically sound, ensuring the accuracy and validity of the data collected.

Descriptive analysis: Descriptive statistics were employed in this study to summarize the dataset, primarily through the calculation of means and standard deviations. The mean represents the average numerical value of the responses, while the standard deviation measures the degree of variability from the mean. The higher mean values for relational and balanced contracts suggest that respondents generally agree with or hold positive perceptions of these contract types, assuming a Likert scale from 1 to 5. In contrast, the lower mean value for transactional contracts suggests a more neutral stance among respondents. The standard deviation values provide insights into response consistency: Relational (SD=0.66) and balanced contracts (SD=0.69) show moderate variability, suggesting consistent responses among participants. Transactional contract exhibits the highest variability (SD=0.97), indicating diverse perspectives among respondents regarding its role in student retention. Transitional contract and student retention show moderate variability, SD=0.70 and SD=0.74, respectively, indicating that perceptions of these constructs are relatively consistent but not as strong as those for relational and balanced contracts.

Normality test: The skewness values for all dependent and independent variables were within the range of -1 and +1. The skewness values for student retention, relational contract, balance contract, transactional contract and transitional contract were -0.226, -1.032, -0.894, 0.051 and -0.109, respectively. According to Hair et al. (2010), a skewness value between -1 and +1 is considered excellent for normality. All skewness values fall within the acceptable range (-1 to +1), confirming that the data distribution is approximately normal. The kurtosis values for all dependent and independent variables were also within the acceptable range of ± 7 for student retention, relational contract, balance contract, transactional contract and transitional contract were 0.206, 3.438, 2.399, -0.419, and 0.538, respectively. Kurtosis values remain within the acceptable ± 7 range, ensuring the dataset does not display extreme skew or flat distributions. Kurtosis values within the range of ± 7 are deemed acceptable. (Hair et al., 2010).

Correlation analysis: Correlation analysis evaluates the strength and direction of relationships between variables. In this study, Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine associations between the independent variables (psychological contract types: relational, balanced, transactional, and transitional) and the dependent variable (student retention).

As illustrated in Table 1, the results indicate that the transitional contract ($r = 0.628$, $p < 0.01$) exhibits the strongest positive correlation, suggesting a moderate to strong association with student retention. The transactional contract ($r = 0.514$, $p < 0.01$) also shows a moderate positive correlation, though weaker than the transitional contract.

In contrast, the relational contract ($r = 0.455$, $p < 0.01$) and balanced contract ($r = 0.452$, $p < 0.01$) demonstrate weak positive correlations, implying a relatively lower influence on student retention. These findings suggest that transitional and transactional contracts play a more significant role in influencing student retention than relational and balanced contracts.

Table 1: Correlational analysis

Variables	1	2	3	4	5
Dependent variable:					
Student retention	1				
Independent variable:					
Relational contract	.455**	1			
Balanced contract	.452**	.747**	1		
Transactional contract	.514**	.316**	.336**	1	
Transitional contract	.628**	.535**	.535**	.478**	1

Note: **. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Multiple regression analysis: Table 2 portrays the result of the multiple regression analysis. The R^2 value of 0.470 suggests that 47% of the variability in student retention is accounted for by the four psychological contract types. Among them, transactional and transitional contracts exhibit significant positive effects on student retention ($p < .001$), with the transitional contract demonstrating the strongest influence ($\beta = 0.412$). Conversely, relational and balanced contracts show no statistically significant effect on student retention ($p > 0.05$), indicating their limited role in influencing student retention outcomes. These results highlight that while transactional and transitional contracts are crucial factors, relational and balanced contracts exert minimal influence in academic retention contexts.

Table 2: Multiple regression analysis results

Model	Unstandardized coefficient		Standardized coefficient		t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta			
(Constant)	.729	.200			3.642	<.001
Relational contract	.114	.068	.101		1.672	.095
Balanced contract	.073	.066	.068		1.112	.267
Transactional contract	.202	.034	.263		5.871	<.001
Transitional contract	.435	.054	.412		8.049	<.001
F value	76.935					
Sig.	<.0001 _b					
Adjusted R	.464					
R^2	.470					
Regression df	4					
Residual df	347					

Note: Dependent Variable: Student Retention; * $p < 0.05$

Hypothesis Testing

H1: There is a significant relationship between relational contract and student retention.

Multiple regression analysis was conducted to test H1. The p-value (0.095) exceeded the 0.05 threshold, indicating no significant relationship between relational contract and student retention ($\beta = 0.101$, $p > 0.05$). Thus, H1 was not supported. Relational contracts, which emphasize loyalty and long-term commitment, are beneficial in workplace environments (Liu et al., 2020; van Gilst et al., 2020). However, findings suggest that students do not prioritize these contracts in their educational experiences. Despite past research linking stability to positive student outcomes (Felsten, 2004; Gagani et al., 2021; Kumaravelu, 2018), modern students favour flexibility and autonomy over institutional loyalty.

While academic and administrative support fosters student retention (Latif et al., 2021; Sabo, 2022) Students increasingly prioritize factors such as facilities, teaching quality, and support systems. Traditional relational contracts may feel restrictive, as students view education as a means to achieving specific goals rather than forming long-term institutional ties. Additionally, cultural shifts emphasize adaptability over stability, and students may perceive relational contracts as one-sided, leading to disengagement.

H2: There is a significant relationship between balanced contracts and student retention.

Multiple regression analysis was used to test Hypothesis 2, which proposed a significant relationship between balanced contracts and student retention. The findings indicated no significant correlation ($\beta = 0.068$, $p > 0.05$), implying that H2 was not supported. A balanced contract that consists of external employability, internal advancement, and dynamic performance is appreciated in the workplace, yet it might not attract students in an educational setting. External employability may create pressure, causing students to prioritize more on job preparation over academic progress which could negatively affect retention in their studies. Internal advancement, although fostering academic growth but can create an unrealistic expectation that leads students to even more stress and withdrawal. Similarly, dynamic performance might emphasize results instead of individual learning which can increase academic stress. Students might perceive the balanced contract as misaligned with their priorities, regarding it as excessively corporate or focused on performance instead of fostering their academic experience. Cultural and generational changes also contribute because students prefer flexibility and comprehensive education instead of systematic progress. This misalignment could lead to disengagement, stress, and an increased risk of dropping out.

H3: There is a significant relationship between transactional contracts and student retention.

Multiple regression analysis was used to evaluate Hypothesis 3, which suggested that there is a significant relationship between transactional contracts and student retention. The findings supported this relationship ($\beta = 0.263$, $p < 0.05$), indicating that H3 was supported. In contrast to the workplace, where transactional contracts emphasize brief exchanges between employers and employees, higher education students perceive transactional contracts differently. Students prioritize immediate advantages like timely feedback, availability of academic resources, and effective administrative support. Participating in organized activities, like student clubs can improve their educational experience by providing opportunities to develop skills outside of traditional learning.

Transactional contracts meet students' expectations by highlighting straightforward, results-oriented exchanges, like receiving academic services in exchange for tuition and finishing coursework. This method encourages a feeling of inclusion and confidence in the institution, resulting in improved retention rates. Transactional contracts are seen as an effective and favoured approach in academic environments as students perceive education as a valuable investment that yields real benefits,

H4: There is a significant relationship between transitional contract and student retention.

A multiple regression analysis was conducted to test Hypothesis 4, which suggested that there is a significant relationship between transitional contract and student retention. The findings showed a statistically significant correlation between transitional contract and student retention ($\beta = 0.412$, $p < 0.05$), indicating that H4 is supported. Transitional contracts frequently bring uncertainty and mistrust in organizational settings but, they influence differently among students in academic settings where uncertainty and mistrust may foster greater student involvement even though uncertainty and mistrust are generally viewed negatively. Research indicates that when students feel uncertain about institutional expectations they might engage more actively in moulding their educational journey. (Cavanagh et al., 2018). For example, to increase engagement and enhance retention, they might request clarification, interact with faculty, and champion their academic needs.

Torgersen (2023) emphasizes that managing uncertainty equips students to confront academic and social challenges. This can also serve as a driving force that encourages students to pursue institutional support like academic advising and counselling although uncertainty may lead to stress (Haverila et al., 2020; Koskina, 2013; Saleem et al., 2022; Tuiloma, 2022). Students' feelings of sense of belonging which is vital for student retention can be enhanced if the institutions respond to student issues effectively during these times. However, strict assessment methods can erode trust, leading to disengagement. (Azmat & Ahmad, 2022). A flexible and adaptive strategy in transitional contracts encourages trust cultivates a supportive academic environment. (Hui et al., 2004). Students are more likely to seek assistance when they perceive a lack of connection or feel worn down by institutional demand. Student retention rates can be improved and trust may be rebuilt if institutions offer customized interventions, individual support, and adaptability. (Demirkasimoğlu, 2014).

Students often prefer transitional contracts because they offer flexibility that aligns with their evolving academic and career goals. Unlike relational contracts, which emphasize long-term loyalty, or balanced

contracts, which require mutual long-term commitment, transitional contracts focus on short-term adaptability. This flexibility helps students navigate academic, social, and financial pressures more effectively, allowing them to stay engaged without being constrained by strict institutional demands.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

Relational contract: Finding indicates that there is no significant relationship, suggesting that stability and loyalty which are the key elements of relational contracts do not significantly impact students' decision to remain in the institution. This could result from the students' focus on short-term goals rather than long-term dedication to the institution because of the temporary nature of academic settings. The effectiveness of relational contract relies on institutions offering fair resources and assistance can improve retention by building trust and loyalty. Nonetheless, frequent changes in academic staff and classmates might obstruct the establishment of strong relational connections. To address this, institutions can implement mentorship programs, academic advising, and community-building activities to enhance student engagement and improve loyalty. Encouraging community engagement via peer mentoring, campus events, and collaborative learning can further improve retention. Also, enhancing satisfaction and dedication to the institution can be increased by getting timely feedback and participation in co-curricular activities. Regular assessment of relational contract effectiveness via surveys and retention analysis can assist in improving strategies can ensuring the alignment with student needs and fostering academic and personal success.

Balanced contract: The findings of this study indicate no significant relationship between balanced contract and student retention suggesting that opportunities for employment, internal advancement, and dynamic performance might not be major elements in affecting students' decision to retain in educational institutions. Balanced contracts focusing on long-term advantages like career growth and skill enhancement but students prioritize immediate academic goals over these broader opportunities. Uneven allocation of opportunities for advancement might be one of the possible reasons for the disconnect of this variable. Students might perceive that these advantages are exclusive to top performers only makes them lose interest. Moreover, students underestimate the significance of balanced agreements because of a lack of awareness regarding employability initiatives (Abas-Mastura et al., 2013). To address this, institutions need to encourage inclusiveness and ensure all students can utilize these advantages by providing career workshops, leadership initiatives, and skill development integrated into the curriculum. Also, institutions can boost student involvement by cultivating and engaging a learning environment through activity-based and problem-solving educational programs. Self-learning experiences, like teamwork, can enhance students' readiness for practical challenges. Enhancing career services through mentorship initiatives, job placements, and networking can improve students' employability. Giving consistent evaluation through student feedback and retention data can assist institutions in enhancing strategies to address changing student requirements. Implementing this measure of a comprehensive support system that consists of counselling, peer mentoring, and stress management workshops by the institution can effectively boost student retention rates while ensuring academic and professional success.

Transactional contract: This research investigates the relationship between transactional contracts and student retention among UiTM students. The findings indicate a positive correlation, supporting the hypothesis that students appreciate well-defined, immediate interactions with their institution. Transactional contracts align with students' expectations, which focus on short-term commitments and a clear administrative process, increasing their likelihood to retain when the academic and administrative needs are efficiently met (She et al., 2020). The success of transactional contracts in retaining clients depends on their capacity to offer prompt academic feedback, readily available resources, and efficient administrative services. Students' contentment grows and strengthens their loyalty to the institution when the students recognize fairness in assessments, transparent guidelines, and effective procedures. In course registration, fee payment, or access to educational resources can enhance this connection, making institutional effectiveness vital for student retention. Institutions should simplify administrative procedures, ensuring minimal obstacles in enrolment, financial transactions, and access to resources to improve student retention. When universities clearly explain their academic policies and grading standards, it helps build trust with students and regularly checking in on how satisfied students are can also help institutions spot areas that need improvement. By enhancing these aspects,

institutions can improve student retention through clear, short-term agreements, while also encouraging long-term engagement that supports student success.

Transitional contract: The findings of this study showed that there is a significant relationship between transitional contract and student retention at UiTM Selangor Branch. This finding supports the study's hypothesis that students valued the transitional contract. The finding shows that factors like uncertainty, mistrust and adaptation to change play a big role in how committed students feel to their studies. Transitional contracts can provide a sense of flexibility as they might perceive transitional contracts as a structure for resilience and flexibility, assisting them in navigating their academic journey. During significant changes, like transitioning from high school to college, advancing through academic achievements, or getting ready for employment, transitional contracts in tertiary education help students get through this journey. These highlight the organized direction and institutional assistance that can improve retention by providing clear pathways and resources. Their success relies on the institution's capability to anticipate student requirements and cultivate an inclusive atmosphere. Students might find it hard to adjust in the absence of proactive actions resulting in disengagement and decreased retention rates. Institutions ought to establish thorough onboarding programs, bridging courses, and mentorship schemes to enhance the connection between transitional contracts and retention. Offering organized academic and social assistance, including career advice, skill-development workshops, and peer mentoring, can facilitate transitions. Additionally, promoting emotional well-being through mental health resources and social integration efforts can help students feel secure and engaged. Regular monitoring through surveys and performance data will ensure programs remain relevant and responsive. By implementing these strategies, institutions can create robust transitional contracts that support student success academically, socially, and professionally.

Conclusion: The findings of this study have demonstrated the relationship between psychological contract (relational, balanced, transactional and transitional) and student retention. Based on this finding, several key recommendations are proposed from the analysis and discussion of this study's outcomes to enhance student retention as well as improve academic success that arose. Enhancing the psychological contract requires a diverse strategy at the institutional level. Firstly, institutions should establish a detailed onboarding program to define a clear academic path. These programs may include thorough orientations, mentorship pairing with senior students, and early academic guidance to assist students in confidently navigate themselves in new surroundings. Moreover, promoting transparent dialogue by giving consistent feedback can guarantee that students feel acknowledged and supported. Also, institutions should promote the encouragement of collaboration among students, faculty, and industry professionals. Facilitating workshops, networking events, and mentorship programs can offer students essential professional perspectives and relationships that can enhance their academic growth. Furthermore, the student participation in extracurricular activities and community activities can be increased if provided with some incentives like certificates, scholarships, or honours for leadership roles and volunteer work. Institutions can establish a supportive and dynamic educational environment that can strengthen the psychological contract, promote student involvement, and enhance overall retention through the implementation of these strategies.

Research Limitation: One significant limitation while conducting this study was the time constraints during the data collection process and analysis. The short timeline had limited the depth of the investigation and the opportunity to collect a larger dataset that might have provided additional insight into the study. Given more time, the study could have been reinforced by having a larger sample size, subsequent interviews, and improved methodological strategies, such as testing surveys or employing advanced statistical methods. Consequently, despite being useful, the results might not entirely reflect the complexity of the research issue. Other challenges were the reliance on an online platform to collect data from respondents. Although it was easy access and convenience, the slower response rates from the respondents and some delays due to conflicting priorities or technical issues affected data-collection efficiency. Moreover, bias in responses could have arisen if late respondents held a different opinion compared to early participants, potentially affecting the reliability of the data.

Sampling and participants' behaviour also contributed to the limitations of this study. Despite efforts being made to gather a large group of participants, a self-selection participant might have affected the results as individuals with a stronger interest in the topic were more likely to participate and take part in the survey. To

get a strong engagement from the participants, a small incentive was offered but this may have attracted the participants who were more interested in the reward than the survey itself which raised concerns regarding the response quality. Considering these limitations, the findings of this study should be interpreted with caution, Future research with longer timelines, a larger and more diverse sample and participant involvement could provide more comprehensive and generalizable insights into the research problem.

Recommendation for Future research: This study focused on student retention mainly in higher education institutions by exploring the influence of psychological contract as a variable which includes relational contract, balanced contract, transitional contract and transactional contract. While the results provide valuable insight, student retention is an issue that needs a deeper investigation and future exploration. To expand on the existing study, a number of suggestions are proposed for future research. It is to explore further elements that may influence psychological contract among students at higher educational levels including peer support, friendship and teamwork. Social dynamics can significantly contribute to enhancing students' sense of belonging and dedication to their studies. Future research might explore whether strong peer networks can bring a positive impact on relational and balanced contracts or if their lack reduces these benefits. Moreover, expanding the sample size to include students from other UiTM campuses, as well as students from public universities and private institutions in Malaysia this would improve the generalizability of the findings. Private university students may experience a different study environment, institution support structures, and challenges related to retention. This highlights the importance of a comparative perspective to have a wider effect of psychological contracts in different educational environments.

Future studies can also consider including secondary-level students to investigate the psychological contract between them. Examining the impacts of psychological contract and student retention among younger students might broaden the comprehensiveness of the role throughout various educational levels. This might help to determine whether relational contract and transactional contract both have the same impact if conducting these studies by including younger participants from secondary educational level compared to tertiary educational level students since the impact may differ for both educational levels. Lastly, future studies can implement a longitudinal study which can offer a deeper understanding of how students' perceptions of psychological contract might change over time and how these perceptions can impact their likelihood of staying enrolled in their study until graduation. Future studies could also examine how external factors like changes in economic conditions and social changes influence the psychological contract that can affect student retention. Conducting a study on these topics, future research may contribute to a more holistic understanding of the relationship between psychological contract and student retention and can help educational institutions to develop more effective strategies to support students' likelihood to remain in the same institution and retain them until graduation.

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