

**THE INFLUENCE OF INNATE  
PSYCHOLOGICAL NEEDS ON INTENTION TO  
STAY AMONG ACADEMICS EMPLOYED AT  
MALAYSIAN RESEARCH UNIVERSITIES**

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**UNIVERSITI SAINS MALAYSIA**

**2022**

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by

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**Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements  
for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy**

**June 2022**

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

First and foremost, I would like to express my gratitude to the management of Graduate School of Business (GSB) in Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) for accepting me as a PhD candidate. I am indeed thankful to my kind and knowledgeable supervisors, Dr. Noor Fareen Abdul Rahim, Associate Prof Dr. Junaimah Jauhar, and Dr. Haniruzila Md. Hanifah. To my main supervisor, Dr. Noor Fareen Abdul Rahim, thank you for your patience in me, providing me the vision, encouragement and advice to proceed and complete this thesis. I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude for everything that you have done for me and I believe I have learned a lot from the best supervisor I ever had. To my co-supervisors, Associate Prof Dr. Junaimah Jauhar, and Dr. Haniruzila Md. Hanifah, it was a great privilege and honour to work and study under your guidance. Again, I would like to express my special thanks to Dr. Noor Fareen Abdul Rahim, Associate Prof Dr. Junaimah Jauhar, and Dr. Haniruzila Md. Hanifah for their continuous encouragement, endless patience, dedication, guidance, tremendous support and valuable time rendered during this entire challenging PhD journey.

My deepest gratitude is also extended to both my internal examiners, Dr. Yashar Salamzadeh and Dr. Christopher Richardson. Their comments and suggestions during the proposal defense had triggered me to explore further and improve my research. I am also grateful to Prof. Ramayah for his statistical teachings and willingness to share his expertise. In addition, I would like to extend special thanks and appreciation to all my lecturers who have taught me, sharing knowledge and providing kindness assistance during my study in USM. My heartfelt thanks are also

extended to the academics in all Malaysian research universities who provided me with the support in the research survey.

Last but not least, my innermost gratitude goes to my family members, for their understanding, support and love during my journey in completing this thesis. Finally, my gratitude is also extended to my friend for providing me with much-needed encouragement, peace of mind and support. I will never forget their favour in my lifetime.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AVE	Average Variance Extracted
CMV	Common Method Variance
CR	Composite Reliability
DV	Dependent Variable
EE	Employee Engagement
GoF	Goodness-of-Fit
IS	Intention to Stay
IV	Independent Variable
JA	Job Autonomy
KPIs	Key Performance Indicators
MOHE	Ministry of Higher Education
PEB	Perceived Employer Brand
PLS	Partial Least Squares
PLS-SEM	Partial Least Squares-Structural Equation Modelling
PO	Psychological Ownership
POS	Perceived Organizational Support
SPSS	Statistical Package for Social Science
SS	Social Status

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**PENGARUH KEPERLUAN PSIKOLOGI SEMULA JADI TERHADAP NIAT  
UNTUK KEKAL BEKERJA DALAM KALANGAN KAKITANGAN  
AKADEMIK DI UNIVERSITI PENYELIDIKAN DI MALAYSIA**

**ABSTRAK**

Penyelidikan ini dijalankan untuk mengkaji keperluan psikologi semula jadi di kalangan kakitangan akademik di universiti penyelidikan di Malaysia. Ia merangkumi keperluan psikologi semula jadi dari sudut autonomi, kecekapan, dan pertalian yang boleh mempengaruhi niat untuk kekal bekerja. Model kajian telah dibina berdasarkan teori keazaman sendiri untuk mengenal pasti bagaimana faktor-faktor keperluan psikologi semula jadi menerusi tiga keperluan psikologi semula jadi boleh mempengaruhi niat untuk kekal bekerja melalui penglibatan pekerja. Kajian ini menyiasat bagaimana penglibatan pekerja memainkan peranan sebagai pengantara antara keperluan psikologi semula jadi dan niat untuk kekal bekerja. Kajian ini juga menyiasat hubungan antara penglibatan pekerja dan niat untuk kekal bekerja. Di samping itu, kajian ini juga mengkaji bagaimana persepsi sokongan organisasi memainkan peranan sebagai penyederhana dalam hubungan di antara keperluan psikologi semula jadi dan penglibatan pekerja. Data diperolehi dari 329 kakitangan akademik Malaysia dari lima buah universiti penyelidikan di Malaysia melalui soalan kaji selidik secara atas talian yang digubal berdasarkan sorotan kajian yang lepas. Data kemudiannya dianalisis dengan menggunakan perisian SPSS dan Smart PLS. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahawa keperluan psikologi semula jadi untuk autonomi (autonomi pekerjaan), kecekapan (status sosial), dan pertalian (pemilikan psikologi) mempunyai kesan positif yang signifikan terhadap penglibatan pekerja. Keperluan psikologi semula jadi untuk autonomi (autonomi pekerjaan), kecekapan (status sosial),



dan pertalian (pemilikan psikologi) mempunyai kesan positif yang signifikan terhadap penglibatan pekerja. Keperluan psikologi semula jadi untuk autonomi (autonomi pekerjaan), kecekapan (status sosial), dan pertalian (pemilikan psikologi) juga didapati mempunyai kesan tidak langsung yang signifikan terhadap niat untuk kekal bekerja melalui penglibatan pekerja sebagai pengantara. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahawa penglibatan pekerja mempunyai hubungan positif yang signifikan ke atas niat untuk kekal bekerja. Penyelidikan ini tidak menemui kesan penyederhanaan persepsi sokongan organisasi dalam hubungan di antara keperluan psikologi semula jadi dan penglibatan pekerja. Kajian ini adalah penting kepada ahli akademik dan penggubal polisi yang berhasrat untuk memahami faktor-faktor yang menyumbang kepada niat untuk kekal bekerja di kalangan kakitangan akademik. Akhir sekali, limitasi kajian ini turut dijelaskan, dan cadangan untuk penyelidikan seterusnya turut dibincangkan.

**THE INFLUENCE OF INNATE PSYCHOLOGICAL NEEDS ON  
INTENTION TO STAY AMONG ACADEMICS EMPLOYED AT  
MALAYSIAN RESEARCH UNIVERSITIES**

**ABSTRACT**

This study examined the relevance of innate psychological needs among Malaysian academics in the context of Malaysian research universities. It encompasses the innate psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness that can influence the intention to stay. A model was developed based on the self-determination theory to identify the predictors of innate psychological needs to examine how influential factors in three innate psychological needs can enhance the intention to stay through employee engagement. This study investigated how employee engagement plays a mediating role between innate psychological needs and the intention to stay. This study also investigated the relationship between employee engagement and the intention to stay. In addition, this study also examined how perceived organizational support moderates the relationship between innate psychological needs and employee engagement. Data was collected from 329 Malaysian academics from five Malaysian research universities via an online survey questionnaire developed from related literature. The collected data was then analyzed using Smart PLS. Findings indicate that innate psychological needs for autonomy (job autonomy), competence (social status), and relatedness (psychological ownership) have a significant positive impact on employee engagement. Innate psychological needs for autonomy (job autonomy), competence (social status), and relatedness (psychological ownership) were also found to have a significant indirect effect on the intention to stay via employee engagement as a mediator. Employee engagement also has a significant positive relationship with

the intention to stay. This research did not find the moderating effect of perceived organizational support on the relationship between innate psychological needs and employee engagement. The theoretical and practical contributions of the research findings were discussed. The findings of this study are useful to both academics and policy makers who wish to understand the factors that contribute to the intention to stay among academics. Finally, the limitations of the study were explained, and recommendations for future research were also presented.

# **CHAPTER 1**

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Introduction**

This chapter provides a brief background on the study. It comprises the problem statement, research gap, research objectives, research questions, and significance of the study. The definitions of key terms and the structure of the remaining chapters are also presented at the end of this chapter.

### **1.2 Background of Study**

Understanding factors that influence an employee's intention to stay is essential for an organization. However, the intention to leave among employees has captured the interest of researchers for a long time (Awang et al., 2015; Mahomed & Rothmann, 2019; Nair, Mee, & Cheik, 2016; Ramasamy & Abbudullah, 2020). Previous researchers have attempted to measure the intention to stay on the assumption that it is a more positive construct than the intention to leave and have considered that the same construct is the best predictor of staff retention (Alemu & Pykhtina, 2020; Ghosh, Satyawadi, Joshi, & Shadman, 2013; Nancarrow, Bradbury, Pit, & Ariss, 2014). However, the factors that influence the employees' intention to leave the job do not necessarily influence their intention to stay on the job (Bello & Steil, 2020; Chamchan & Kittisuksathit, 2019). Although there is no complementary relationship between these two constructs, the intention to stay is the best predictor of staff retention (Steil, Penha, & Bonilla, 2016). Intention to stay refers to the willingness of an employee to remain in the organization, and they are aware of their decision after careful consideration (Tett & Meyer, 1993). Armstrong (2009) explains that retention

is a voluntary initiative by the organization to create an environment that engages employees; it attempts to ensure that employees stay in employment for a long period of time.

Talent retention has become a crucial issue and an imperative concern for organizations everywhere (Mehrez & Bakri, 2019; Naim & Lenka, 2017a; Naim & Lenkla, 2016). Within the higher education sector, the issue is especially paramount because retaining competent academics entails not only having the necessary expertise, competencies, and knowledge, but also a collection of professional resources that are required to carry out a specific activity and to stay abreast of the latest innovations (Kandasamy, Munusamy, & Arumugam, 2018; López-Meneses, Sirignano, Reyes-Tejedor, Cunzio, & Gómez-Galán, 2017). The intention to stay among high-quality academics is the cornerstone of any successful educational institution, as they are considered the highest source of knowledge and train the future workforce to become specialist manpower in various fields of life (Khalid, Irshad, & Mahmood, 2012; Stankovska, Angelkoska, Osmani, & Grncarovska, 2017). According to Yimer, Nega, and Ganfure (2017), high-quality academics who have intention of staying will help universities achieve their vision and mission and become centers of excellence.

Researchers have pointed out that a research university's future depends on the intellectual capital, creative ability, and devotion of their academics as compared to other organizations (Hundera, 2014; Kadiresan, Arumugam, Selamat, & Parasuraman, 2016; Ng'ethe, Iravo, & Namusonge, 2012; Yimer et al., 2017). This is because research universities are knowledge-intensive organizations that are uniquely positioned to take on the role in the field of research, preparing individuals for employment and disseminating knowledge to students and society (Al-Kurdi, El-

Haddadeh, & Eldabi, 2020; Musa, Kin, Yunus, Hamid, & Sedhu, 2020). The academics is supposed to be a repository of the nation's most specialized and competent intellectuals, as well as a storehouse of knowledge for nurturing the nation's manpower needs (Raina & Khatri, 2015; Yimer et al., 2017). Therefore, there is a greater need for human resource development practitioners in research universities to focus their attention and energy on identity factors to enhance the intention to stay among academics (Matongolo, Kasekende, & Mafabi, 2018).

From the perspective of a research university, the academics serves as the backbone in contributing to positive outcomes in the quality of the institutions and the students' learning (Choong, Keh, Tan, & Tan, 2013; Nawi et al., 2016; Rathakrishnan, Imm, & Kok, 2016; Stankovska et al., 2017). The standards used in measuring quality should touch on research, teaching, and community service, which are the common areas covered by the work performed by academics (Ssempebwa, Neema-Abooki, & Musaaazi, 2017). Research is seen as an important element in assessing the contribution of academics. Furthermore, research provides a good platform to share knowledge with students and others in the drive to develop professional skills and have a positive influence on society as a whole (Fauzi, Tan, Daud, & Awalludin, 2020; Olatokunbo, 2013). Without well-qualified and committed academics, no academic institution can really ensure sustainability and quality over the long haul (Barkhuizen, Mogwere, & Schutte, 2014; Ng'ethe et al., 2012; Robyn & Du Preez, 2013). This, therefore, makes it critically important to improve the intention to stay among academics than most other organizations.

Furthermore, the intention to stay among high-quality academics is also very important in developing a country (Selesho & Naile, 2014). Academics is as crucial as the pillars of a building that support the whole of it. So basically, academics is thought

to be the nation's builders and they are always recognized as intellectual leaders for the development of society (Al-Kurdi et al., 2020; Albadi, Hussain, & Ahmad, 2017; Yimer et al., 2017). This is because education remains a major component in improving population quality by equipping learners with the necessary knowledge, skills, and abilities required to work for sustainable development as well as safeguard the environment and the socioeconomic well-being that will benefit present and future generations (Ekene & Oluoch-Suleh, 2015). Othman, Mokhtar, and Asaad (2017) added that higher education is also one of the main contributors to a country's economy, employment opportunities, income and export income, and the development of states and countries as a whole. In other words, academics play a vital and significant role in improving the quality of education by raising the value of human capital, which in turn contributes to economic growth (Kucharčíková, Tokarčíková, & Blašková, 2015).

According to Daud, Yaakob, and Ghazali (2015), academics in research universities are expected to give lectures, hold supervisory roles in students' research, publish high-impact research articles, and continue to generate excellent graduates who are willing to grow together with the university. The quality of an academics' publication is also determined based on the high-quality publications in journals and citations through the h (HIRST)-index (Azman, Omar, Yunus, & Zain, 2016). This subsequently becomes the benchmark for determining the quality of institutions, providing the university and researchers with prestige and funding, and determining how productive the academic institution is compared to others (Jang & Liem, 2020). As a result, universities should provide various educational programmes to encourage academics to improve their academic research skills, as well as prioritize efforts to increase the desire to remain or the intention to stay among talented academics. This

is crucial for the university because an academics' tacit knowledge is difficult to replace. Moreover, the loss of talented academics may have a negative impact on research output and the reputation of universities (Daud et al., 2015; Kadiresan, Kamil, Mazlan, Musah, & Selamat, 2016).

As stated in the Horizons workforce consulting report, 65% of academics have considered leaving their institution, and 44% of those surveyed have a potential desire to leave academia entirely (English & Avakian, 2012). In a study on meeting academics' expectations and institutional needs, Malaysian research universities are losing a large number of academics for a variety of reasons (Yunus & Pang, 2015a). For instance, the expertise and experience of a reputable academics sought by another private institution for better opportunities, more favourable key performance indicators (KPIs), and the desire to gain new experience from one research university to another sector or private university are all factors that contribute to staff movement (Tambi, Muslim, Yusof, & Tahir, 2017; Yunus & Pang, 2015a). The issue of turnover intention among academics could be detrimental to the smooth running of higher learning institutions (Awang et al., 2015; Saraih, Aris, Sakdan, & Ahmad, 2017). It is therefore vital to identify the antecedents that influence the intention to stay among academics in their current research universities.

To continue competing successfully in the global economy, improving the quality of education, and maintaining its relevance to socioeconomic needs in the age of globalization, universities should know what factors determine the intention to stay among academics (Aslan, Shaukat, Ahmed, Shah, & Mahfar, 2014; Nawi et al., 2016). This is because academics are expected to be effective in their daily responsibilities, including teaching, supervision, consultancy, and research; only those who are intrinsically motivated and more deeply engaged in the pursuit of these goals can



obtain greater success in higher education (Asaari, Dwivedi, Lawton, & Desa, 2016; Blume & Candela, 2018; Kay, Shane, & Heckhausen, 2016). When academics are disengaged, they withdraw and defend themselves during role performances, either physically, cognitively, or emotionally. This will eventually drive a greater desire to leave the educational organization (Blume & Candela, 2018; Yadav, 2016). Stankovska et al. (2017) observed that a positive and healthy university environment would increase academics' satisfaction. According to Kalin, Čepić, and Šteh (2017), highly motivated and satisfied academics are more likely to show up for work, perform better, and stay with their educational organization. Understanding what academics' value and need will improve employee engagement and motivate them to stay longer at the university (Blume & Candela, 2018; Moloantoa & Dorasamy, 2017).

Despite the fact that the operating expenditure budget for the 20 public universities increased by 9.77% from RM6.12 billion in 2017 to RM6.72 billion in 2018, Universiti Malaya (UM) vice-chancellor, Datuk Dr Abdul Rahim Hashim, remains aware of the challenges ahead, particularly in terms of financial sustainability (Ministry of Finance Malaysia, 2017, 2018; Zainuddin, 2018). This is because the reduction in the government's funding to the university had a negative impact on its staffing levels and its capacity to retain productive retired academics or professors on a contract basis (Aziz, 2018). As a result of the budget cut, academics' jobs have become more emotionally demanding and more fractured, and this denotes a loss of professional autonomy, scholar identity, and psychological ownership (Barkhuizen et al., 2014; Ylijoki, 2013; Ylijoki & Ursin, 2013). According to Faisal Hazis, Senior Fellow at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), several academics have decided to leave UKM. Furthermore, many good and experienced academics have left the country to work in countries such as Japan, Singapore, and Australia, where their talents and

abilities are better acknowledged and appreciated (Kamal, 2017). As a matter of fact, dissatisfaction with working conditions will only drive quality and experienced academics to seek more appealing lifestyles in other institutions or countries, giving rise to the intention to switch employment (Kadiresan, Arumugam, et al., 2016). Too many pressures on academics, a variety of university missions, and emphasis changes could contribute to uncertainty in terms of academics' roles and work conflicts that may stimulate an intention to leave (Kassim et al., 2018; Noor, 2011).

In Malaysia, public universities are financially supported by the government. As a result, they may not enjoy autonomy due to the extensive rules and regulations used by the government to monitor and regulate higher education (Wan, 2017). Those who lack control over their work may feel as if they have no choice or influence over what they do (Malinowska, Tokarz, & Wardzichowska, 2018). In circumstances where a lack of autonomy and a lack of opportunities to participate in decision-making will be reflected in increased staff turnover rates (Basarudin, Yeon, Yaacob, & Rahman, 2016; Pathak & Srivastava, 2017). On the contrary, giving employees more job autonomy might increase their intrinsic motivation, and may therefore lead to more energy, enthusiasm, and dedicated engagement with their professions (Malinowska et al., 2018).

Secondly, a review of available studies in the teaching profession and the development of quality education has observed that the role and tasks of academics have increased. In contrast, their social prestige and status have remained stagnant (Kalin et al., 2017). In Malaysia, public universities, especially research universities, have a wide range of functions, roles, status, and job expectations that significantly defer to other categories of institutions (Yunus & Pang, 2015a). Some academics may perceive this as unfair because they are not commensurate with their efforts, and this

has caused a substantial movement of academics to other universities, in which it is seen as being easier to obtain higher status, recognition, and appreciation for their contributions (Azman et al., 2016; Othman, Hashim, & Zakaria, 2017; Yunus & Pang, 2015a). Hence, from an academics' perspective, social status is often infused with increased status, social prestige, and depth of involvement, participation, and contributions in the academic profession (Azman et al., 2016).

Apart from that, in Malaysia's higher education scene, academics are constantly moving from universities, especially research universities to non-research universities due to the KPIs drawn by some research universities that appear to be nearly impossible to achieve in comparison to the academics' personal motivation for advancement and passion for the profession (Yunus & Pang, 2015a). In addition, as unveiled by the Ministry of Higher Education and reported in the media, research universities in Malaysia are losing a large number of academics since reputable academics' experience and expertise are well sought after by private institutions or other countries (Kamal, 2017; Yunus & Pang, 2015a). Despite the lack of clear evidence on the amount of brain circulation within universities in Malaysia, a number of contentious statements have been made regarding dissatisfaction with allegedly slow career progression by benchmarking against global research universities in Asia and other regions (Yunus & Pang, 2015a). In other words, a number of academics are leaving for better opportunities, as well as a future organizational reputation as a preferred workplace and an employer of choice (Matongolo et al., 2018). This means that when the management of universities builds a workplace where academics' competencies are respected, the level of intention to stay is likely to improve; individuals are thought to have more favourable perceptions of an organization and, thus, are less inclined to look for a new job (Matongolo et al., 2018). Likewise, a

positive employer brand perceived by academics will make them take pride and pleasure in what they do, consequently directing them to stay with the institutions for a longer period of time (Gilani & Cunningham, 2017; Kashyap & Rangnekar, 2016; Matongolo et al., 2018).

The academics is the focal point that determines a university's status and reputation, making it necessary for university management to make sure that the academics feels a sense of psychological ownership, defined as a feeling of responsibility for the organization's success (Jakada, 2019). Rathakrishnan, Imm, and Kok (2016) believed that when academics have a sense of ownership over their tasks, this would make them more committed to management and, in turn, could reduce their intention to leave. According to Kavya and Padmavathy (2017), a feeling of ownership is where real engagement begins because a highly engaged employee takes on ownership and their enthusiasm will further contribute to the success of an organization. Instilling a sense of ownership in employees, on the other hand, can be difficult because most organizations do not delegate employees who have a strong sense of responsibility and ownership in their job roles.

### **1.2.1 Malaysian Research Universities**

Malaysian public higher education comprises 20 public universities, which are divided into two categories: research universities and non-research universities, as shown in Table 1.1 on the following page.

Table 1.1 List of Public Universities in Malaysia

<b>Categories</b>	<b>Name of University</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Date Established</b>
Research Universities	Universiti Malaya (UM)	Kuala Lumpur	01-Jan-62
	Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM)	Penang	01-Jun-69
	Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM)	Selangor	18-May-70
	Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM)	Selangor	04-Oct-71
	Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM)	Johor	01-Apr-75
Non-Research Universities	Universiti Islam Antarabangsa Malaysia (UIAM)	Selangor	10-May-83
	Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM)	Kedah	16-Feb-84
	Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS)	Sarawak	24-Dec-92
	Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS)	Sabah	24-Nov-94
	Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris (UPSI)	Perak	24-Feb-97
	Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia (USIM)	Negeri Sembilan	13-Mar-98
	Universiti Malaysia Terengganu (UMT)	Terengganu	15-Jul-99
	Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM)	Selangor	26-Aug-99
	Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia (UTHM)	Johor	30-Sep-00
	Universiti Teknikal Malaysia Melaka (UTeM)	Melaka	01-Dec-00
	Universiti Malaysia Pahang (UMP)	Pahang	16-Feb-02
	Universiti Malaysia Perlis (UniMAP)	Perlis	02-May-02
	Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin (UniSZA)	Terengganu	01-Jan-06
	Universiti Malaysia Kelantan (UMK)	Kelantan	14-Jun-06
	Universiti Pertahanan Nasional Malaysia (UPNM)	Kuala Lumpur	11-Oct-06

Source: Ministry of Higher Education

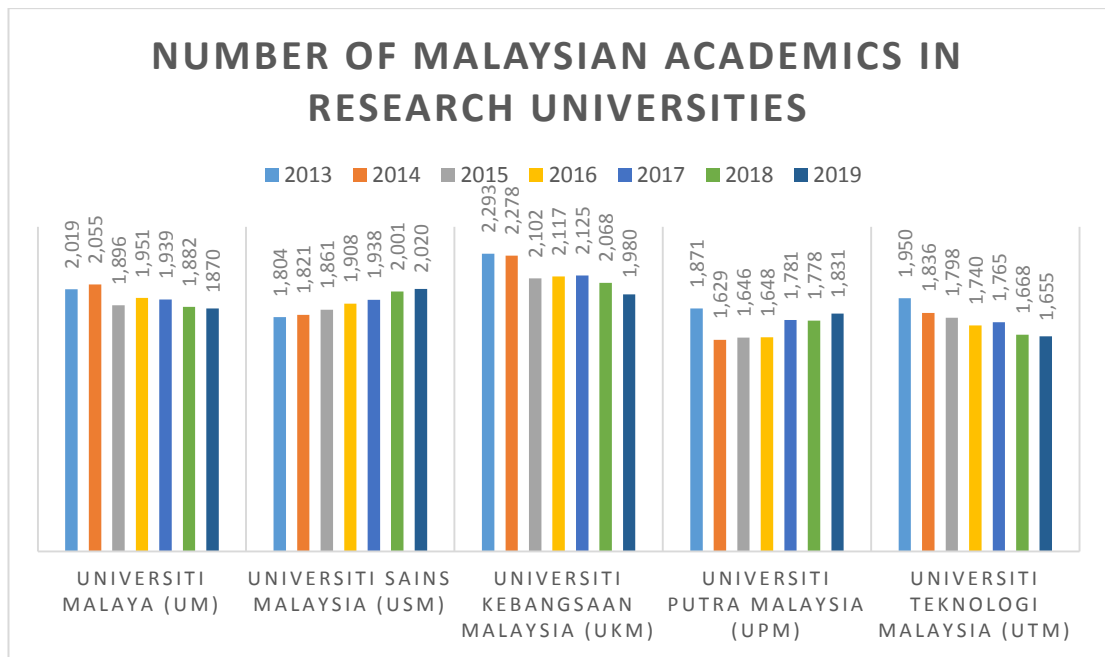
Research universities are regarded as the apex of the country's higher education system, with a wide range of academics' functions that include a clear mission that focuses on research and publication in an environment that encourages exploration, creativity, and the discovery of new knowledge, all of which contribute to a higher quality of life (Basarudin et al., 2016; Kandasamy et al., 2018). The Ministry of Higher Education set the universities under each category into distinctive visions, missions, objectives, and KPIs to facilitate the attainment of the university's status (Basarudin et al., 2016; Ghasemy et al., 2018; Mee, 2017). This is consistent

with the national objective to ensure Malaysian universities stand on par with world universities (Azman et al., 2016; Basarudin et al., 2016).

### **1.2.2 The Decreasing Trends in Intention to Stay**

Academics' intention to turnover remains a prominent phenomenon, with academics leaving higher education institutions to work in other job sectors (Alemu & Pykhtina, 2020; Awang et al., 2015). According to data provided by the Registrar Department of a public educational institution in Malaysia, there is a greater number of medical lecturers leaving research universities as compared to non-research universities, with Universiti Sains Malaysia losing 38 lecturers and the University of Malaya losing 21 clinic lecturers in 2013 (Saraih et al., 2017; Yunus & Pang, 2015a). According to Noor and Ismail (2016), a high proportion of academics have left Malaysian research universities due to work-related stressors, which are closely related to heavier research and teaching loads.

According to Figure 1.1 on the following page, the number of Malaysian academics in five Malaysian research universities has decreased from 9,937 in 2013 to 9,356 in 2019, with a total of 581 confirmed cases of Malaysian academics leaving the institution (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2014; Ministry of Higher Education, 2019; Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia, 2020). That is, from 2013 to 2019, the figure decreased by an average of 97 cases per year (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2014; Ministry of Higher Education, 2019). This issue was quite alarming for the institution.



Source: Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE), Malaysia

Figure 1.1 Number of Malaysian Academics in Malaysian Research Universities (2013 - 2019)

The consequences of turnover among academics will result in high recruitment costs, decreased service quality, waste of management efforts, and demoralization of other employees within the institution (Choong et al., 2013; Kassim et al., 2018). According to Robyn and Du Preez (2013), universities are more reliant on their academics' competence and commitment to developing new knowledge for students, so the loss of a single academics could be more costly and destructive to universities. Moreover, the loss of talented academics will eventually have a damaging impact on the teaching, knowledge transfer, and research output of the institution (Daud et al., 2015; Kadiresan, Kamil, et al., 2016; Robyn & Du Preez, 2013). In order for a research university to have a dynamic development in the areas of teaching and learning as well as research, it has to initiate ways and solutions to retain academics (Kadiresan, Kamil, et al., 2016). This explains why retaining quality academics is

important as the priceless knowledge of an academics is difficult to replace if he or she leaves the institution (Barkhuizen, Roodt, & Schutte, 2014; Kadiresan, Kamil, et al., 2016).

Despite the fact that the importance of enhancing the intention to stay among academics in research universities has been acknowledged as a management challenge that higher education institutions should focus on, studies show that there is limited empirical research to explain this problem, let alone measures that can be utilized to identify and limit academics turnover (Awang et al., 2015; Ismail & Arma, 2016; Theron, Barkhuizen, & Du Plessis, 2014; Yunus & Pang, 2015a, 2015b). Since universities will not be able to function properly if there is a shortage of academics, they need to prevent this problem from continuing (Noor, Zainuddin, Panigrahi, & Rahim, 2018). Various studies have revealed that the decrease in the number of academics may be due to a high turnover trend among academics who believe they are treated unfairly in terms of rewards and workload (Albadi et al., 2017; Azman et al., 2016; Kassim et al., 2018; Khan, Nawaz, Khan, Khan, & Yar, 2013; Ramasamy & Abdullah, 2017; Yunus & Pang, 2015a), high level of job stress (Aziz & Ramli, 2010; Makhbul & Khairuddin, 2013; Nair, Mee, & Cheik, 2016; Ramli, Salahudin, Zainol, & Suandi, 2014), lack of affective commitment and job satisfaction (Al-khrabsheh, Abo-murad, & Bourini, 2018; Khan et al., 2014; Noor, 2011; Ramli et al., 2014; Robyn & Du Preez, 2013), low level of employee engagement, insufficient or absence of recognition, and poor management and leadership (Asaari et al., 2016; Ng'ethe, Iravo, et al., 2012; Robyn & Du Preez, 2013; Yimer et al., 2017). Although most prior studies have identified the reasons why academics leave their positions and suggested strategies to reduce turnover, little attention has been paid to why Malaysian academics' intention to stay with a university. To address this issue, this study will be



focusing on the factors that can attract Malaysian academics to stay in Malaysian research universities and discourage them from leaving.

### **1.2.3 Lack of Employee Engagement**

Based on the statistics of higher education in Malaysia from 2013 to 2019, Malaysian research universities face an increasing turnover rate among their Malaysian academics. This is one of the most crucial problems in improving the quality of universities in Malaysia. It is worth noting that in research universities, shifting the paradigm from teaching to research-oriented requires academics to alter their working styles, which may disengage them from performing their research activities and, as a result, impact their research results (Basarudin et al., 2016).

As suggested by several researchers, it is imperative for organizations to improve and sustain employee engagement, as well as the likelihood of their intention to stay (Beck & Harter, 2015; Dabke & Patole, 2014; James Harter, 2015). For instance, Taylor (2012) found that engaged employees were three times as likely to be very satisfied at work and twice as likely to stay in their current positions. In fact, a study by Gallup (2016) revealed that universities are among the least engaged workplaces in the world, with only 34% of university faculty and staff engaged in their jobs. Quantum Workplace (2016) also reported that industries with the fewest engaged employees were in academia or higher education (60%).

In this regard, there is considerable scope for academics to engage in extra-role performance in developing a university's growth (Naidu & Derani, 2016; Wilkins, Butt, & Annabi, 2018). According to Bhaker and Sharma (2020), academics are the most crucial aspect of the educational or instructional process because an educational

institution is nothing without a motivated academics; it is just like a body without a soul. In this light, recognizing the forces that affect the engagement level of academics and keeping them in their current employment is critical. The failure to retain academics will lead to high turnover of the academics, causing certain impacts on the institutions (Manogharan, Thivaharan, & Rahman, 2018; Takawira, Coetzee, & Schreuder, 2014).

### **1.3 Problem Statement**

The background above demonstrates that the essence of any higher education institution is its ability to improve the intention to stay among competent academics. An analysis of turnover from 2013 to 2019 revealed that while turnover rates fluctuated year to year, there was an overall upward trend in turnover among Malaysian academics in Malaysian research universities. The figure decreased the number of academics by an average of 97 cases per year (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2014; Ministry of Higher Education, 2019), yet it is unknown whether this will develop into a long-term trend. Although academics' intentions to leave have intrigued researchers and have been extensively studied in the context of higher education institutions (Caraquil, Yepes, Sy, & Daguplo, 2016; Getnet & Shibiru, 2020; Kadiresan, Arumugam, et al., 2016; Rathakrishnan et al., 2016; Rozar, Sidik, Razik, & Zolkepli, 2020; Yimer et al., 2017), the academics' intention to stay in research universities has garnered less attention among researchers. Based on prior studies, the factors influencing employees' intention to stay are different from those that affect employees' intention to leave, thus it is not necessarily valid to measure intention to stay by asking questions about the intention to leave and vice versa (Akhtar, Salleh, & Mehmood, 2017; Nancarrow et al., 2014). Therefore, it is still doubtful whether prior

literature on intention to stay would be applicable in the context of Malaysian research universities.

Retention of academics in higher education institutions is a serious concern since the high turnover rate of academics has implications for the quality, consistency, and stability of higher education institutions (Ng'ethe, Iravo, et al., 2012; Selesho & Naile, 2014). The problem of retaining academics is a global phenomenon that impacts both developed and developing countries (Ng'ethe, Iravo, et al., 2012; Samuel & Chipunza, 2013; Selesho & Naile, 2014). An appropriate understanding of what factors motivate academics to stay is a critical issue in higher education institutions' ability to retain academics (Moloantoa & Dorasamy, 2017; Selesho & Naile, 2014). The retention rate of academics would be influenced by their intention to stay (Mohsin, Salleh, Ishak, & Isa, 2021). However, in the absence of sufficient literature on academics' intentions to stay in the context of research universities, higher education literature was used to determine how the intention to stay in academia had been measured or described. Nevertheless, there is limited evidence showing whether academics have the same motivational factors that influence their intention to stay.

Most prior studies have addressed the issue of turnover due to the failure of an organization's retention strategy to make their employees stay (Dalayga, Baskaran, & Mahadi, 2021; Manogharan et al., 2018; Selesho & Naile, 2014). A review of the research shows that intention to stay is influenced by intrinsic motivation and self-determined motivation, whereby staying on the job is a motivational state of inner desire and potential to remain the person that is engaged in an occupation that is necessary (Asgari, Rad, & Chinaveh, 2017). Since employee engagement has emerged as a critical driver of any business operation (Book, Gatling, & Kim, 2019; Osborne & Hammoud, 2017), several studies found that employee engagement is a predictor of

an employee's intention to stay (Bellamkonda, Santhanam, & Pattusamy, 2021; Fernandes & Balu, 2018; Houssein, Singh, & Arumugam, 2020). While there has been a recent surge of academic interest in employee engagement, there remains much to be learned about its antecedents.

Despite the fact that there are many potential antecedents to employee engagement, many researchers have suggested intrinsic motivation may be a stronger predictor of employee engagement than external motivation (Chiniara & Bentein, 2016; Crome, Meyer, Bosanquet, & Hughes, 2019; Meyer, 2017; Meyer & Gagné, 2008; Parfyonova et al., 2019). The most ideal forms of motivation are seen to come from self-determination theory, with an emphasis on the three innate psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness rather than extrinsic or external motivation (Shuck, Peyton Roberts, & Zigarmi, 2018; Whipp & Salin, 2018). Following the self-determination theory, intrinsic motivation suggests optimal human functioning in terms of engagement, well-being, attitudes, and behaviour arises from the satisfaction of the three basic innate psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 1985a, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2000b). Likewise, Meyer and Gagné (2008) called for more research to identify and explain the innate psychological needs that lead to higher levels of engagement. In-depth studies with regard to the innate psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness to enhance employee engagement among academics at Malaysian research universities were found to be lacking (Haivas, Hofmans, & Pepermans, 2013; Tauhed, Rasdi, Samah, & Ibrahim, 2018).

As indicated by a number of meta-analyses and reviews, many studies have attempted to comprehend the antecedents and outcomes of employee engagement (e.g., Azman et al., 2016; Gilani & Cunningham, 2017; Kavya & Padmavathy, 2017;

Malinowska et al., 2018). A study by Glint (2016) revealed that disengaged employees have a 12 times greater attrition rate than highly engaged employees over the course of a year (Clark, 2018; Glint, 2016). On the other hand, Al-Shbiel, Ahmad, Al-Shbail, Al-Mawali, and Al-Shbail (2018) observed that organizations around the world still report fairly low levels of employee engagement. In connection, several scholars have discovered an indirect link between psychological needs and work intentions (Broeck, Ferris, Chang, & Rosen, 2016; Qian, Wang, Zhang, & Hulland, 2022; Shuck, Zigarmi, & Owen, 2015). There has also been an argument that the indirect links are strengthened by the mediation of engagement (Broeck et al., 2016; Riyanto, Endri, & Herlisha, 2021; Shuck et al., 2015). However, little empirical evidence has explored employee engagement as a mediator in the relationship between innate psychological needs and the intention to stay among academics at Malaysian research universities.

In a separate vein, another key influencer in employee engagement is the role of perceived organizational support. Perceived organizational support means that organizations demonstrate that they care about the benefits and contributions of employees, support employees, and fully consider their needs (Gottman et al., 1998). Perceived organizational support plays a critical role in the employee-employer relationship and has a significant impact on employees' commitment, satisfaction, and other positive behavioural outcomes (Fan, Tang, Chen, & Sun, 2022; Kurtessis et al., 2017; Panaccio & Vandenberghe, 2009). However, when employees perceive little organizational support, the way in which they tend to cope with these situations may have a differential impact on their behaviour (Martín & Topa, 2019). According to Ajilon (2018) and Autry (2019), over 80% of workers actively seek new employment when they feel they are suffering from inadequate support from their organizations. In fact, only two out of every five workers are highly engaged at work; the remainder of

the workforce is struggling to cope with work environments that lack necessary support and emotional connection (Brown & Cepeda, 2013). Studies examining the influence of organizational support on innate psychological needs and employee engagement, especially in the educational industry, are still scarce and most of the studies have been conducted in western countries and in other industries (Tauhed et al., 2018). Thus, in this study, the role of perceived organizational support in moderating the relationship between innate psychological needs and employee engagement should not be overlooked (Fan et al., 2022; Gottman et al., 1998; Guo, Du, Xie, & Mo, 2017; Vansteenkiste, Ryan, & Soenens, 2020).

In response to the above-mentioned problem, the purpose of this study is to explore the factors that influence academics' intention to stay, instead of putting effort into retaining employees who have decided to leave, which is already too late. It was considered imperative to understand the relationship between innate psychological needs as antecedents of employee engagement, which provides insight into what matters to employees and how such fundamental innate psychological needs lead to employee engagement. Perceived organizational support is also expected to have motivational effects on innate psychological needs and employee engagement, which in turn can influence the intention to stay among Malaysian academics employed at Malaysian research universities.

#### **1.4 Research Gap**

From the background of the study and problem statement, several gaps were found from the past literature.

Over the years, literature has shown that most of the previous researchers have identified reasons why employees leave an organization and made recommendations to reduce turnover (Al-khrabsheh et al., 2018; Albadi et al., 2017; Asaari et al., 2016; Aziz & Ramli, 2010; Azman et al., 2016; Kassim et al., 2018; Khan et al., 2013; Khan et al., 2014; Makhbul & Khairuddin, 2013; Nair et al., 2016; Ng'ethe, Namusonge, & Iravo, 2012; Noor, 2011; Ramasamy & Abdullah, 2017; Ramli et al., 2014; Robyn & Du Preez, 2013; Yimer et al., 2017; Yunus & Pang, 2015a). A similar trend was also found in higher education institutions' literature. Literature showed that previous studies either focused more on turnover intention (Awang, Ismail, Hamid, & Yusof, 2016; Caraquil, Yepes, Sy, & Daguplo, 2016; Rozar, Sidik, Razik, & Zolkepli, 2020) than the intention to stay. More studies were focused on other sectors (for example, banking, business services, construction industry, hotels, IT, medical services, private organizations or public organizations, and so on) (Awal, Kumar, Saha, & Saha, 2020; Chin et al., 2019; Choong et al., 2013; Jayasekara & Weerasinghe, 2018; Mamun & Hasan, 2017; Ramasamy & Abbudullah, 2020; Rathakrishnan et al., 2016; Sahu, Pathardikar, & Kumar, 2018; Sheehan, Tham, Holland, & Cooper, 2019; Shin & Jeung, 2019; Uğural, Giritli, & Urbański, 2020; Yigzaw, Temam, Roosmalen, & Stekelenburg, 2020) rather than research universities. While academics have been recognized as a necessary intervention in order to recreate the research university for better educational service delivery and development (Mushemeza, 2016), when analyzing turnover trends, researchers often realize too late that there was actually something that could be done to prevent the academics from leaving (Chen, Rasdi, Ismail, & Asmuni, 2017). Therefore, rather than studying the forces that induce academics to leave, this study is more interested in the factors that

influence the intention to stay among academics employed at Malaysian research universities and attempts to fill the gap in the literature.

In a world challenged by global talent shortages, understanding the factors that influence academics' intention to stay with an institution is critical. There is an argument that there is a strong direct relationship between high levels of engagement and the intention to stay in an organization (Book et al., 2019; Fernandes & Balu, 2018; Kim & Gatling, 2018). Also, some researchers argue that employees with higher turnover intentions tend to have lower engagement levels (Baran & Sypniewska, 2020; Isa & Ibrahim, 2014; Su & Ng, 2018). Despite the increasing recognition in the industry and the call for research regarding engagement (Kim & Gatling, 2018), there are few empirical studies focusing on employee engagement in research universities. The conceptualization of employee engagement for academics in research universities through a literature review was limited and had not been adequately measured. Thus, this study intends to fill the gap by exploring the impact of employee engagement on the intention to stay among academics employed at Malaysian research universities.

While much of the attention has been focused on the outcomes of a highly engaged workforce, the literature has indicated that antecedents to employee engagement should be in place before organizations can realize the benefits of an engaged workforce (Meyer, Gagné, & Parfyonova, 2010; Rejito & Sondari, 2016; Rich, Lepine, & Crawford, 2010; Saks, 2006, 2019). Despite the fact that there has been considerable interest in the subject of engagement research, past research is still lacking in its ability to shed sufficient light on what drives employee engagement at the individual level of analysis (Wörtler, Yperen, & Barelds, 2019). According to self-determination theory, individuals need to feel autonomy, competence, and relatedness in order to experience work engagement (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Gagne and Deci (2005)



found that the fulfillment of basic psychological needs provides intrinsic motivation. Individuals are more likely to internalize their tasks and demonstrate high levels of energy, concentration, and persistence when their needs for competence, relatedness, and autonomy are satisfied (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Wollard and Shuck (2011) provided the most comprehensive studies of employee engagement antecedent research and encountered a widely cited body of literature covering 42 engagement antecedents that can only be accomplished through serious, rigorous research, and only 24 of them have been empirically tested. Furthermore, based on the extensive research by Wollard and Shuck (2011), a gap clearly exists in the literature, specifically regarding job autonomy, social status, perceived employer brand, and psychological ownership as antecedents of employee engagement. As a result of considering arguments in previous studies, the current study aims to fill the gap by focusing on an individual's innate psychological needs, which are expected to develop inner determination for employee engagement and the intention to stay of academics in Malaysian research universities.

While much has been written on engagement, little rigorous academic and empirical research has been conducted, and the term engagement continues to be defined and conceptualized inconsistently (Shuck & Wollard, 2010). Although researchers have further explored the consequences of engagement (Shuck & Reio, 2013; Shuck, Reio, & Rocco, 2011), a review of the literature indicated that the complex mechanism by which employees' engage in the workplace has not been thoroughly explored. The gap has resulted in a disjointed approach to understanding and developing strategies regarding employee engagement within research universities (Leeds & Nierle, 2014). Understanding the influencing variables for positive intention and behaviour at work requires an awareness of the academics' needs for feeling self-determined, which leads to intrinsic motivation and increased engagement (Agarwal,

Yadav, & Acharya, 2015; Sandhya & Sulphrey, 2019; Shuck et al., 2018, 2015). The argument was based on the previously held belief that innate psychological needs are a proxy for intention (Ryan & Deci, 2000b). The role of employee engagement has not been explored thoroughly as a mediating variable (Iqbal, Shabbir, Zameer, Khan, & Sandhu, 2017; Kaur, 2017; Rosli & Hassim, 2017; Sandhya & Sulphrey, 2019; Shuck et al., 2015). As a result, this study attempts to fill this gap by examining the innate psychological needs (job autonomy, social status, perceived employer brand, and psychological ownership) causing employee engagement, as well as the mediating effect of employee engagement on innate psychological needs and intention to stay among Malaysian academics employed at Malaysian research universities. Thus, further examination of employee engagement as a mediating variable between the three aforementioned innate psychological needs and the intention to stay among academics employed at Malaysian research universities is necessary in the present study.

Aside from that, when employees perceive the organization's support, they are more likely to feel a sense of responsibility, and they will demonstrate proactive innovation behaviour while performing well in their roles (Dai, Hou, Chen, & Zhuang, 2018). Satisfying the employees' needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness are included in supervisors' support that makes employees sense the value in the job, get acquainted with the logic to perform the tasks, and enjoy working (Kaabomeir, Mazhari, Arshadi, & Karami, 2022; Ryan & Deci, 2000a; Williams et al., 2011). Gallup's research shows that a manager influences 70% of an employee's motivation (Bradberry, 2016). Gallup's (2018) annual workplace trending also increases satisfaction with a supportive organizational culture that stimulates a positive perception of their employees. The role of perceived organizational support has been

commonly distinguished as an antecedent of behaviour (Biswas & Bhatnagar, 2013; Homberg, Vogel, & Weiherl, 2019; Yadav, 2016). Furthermore, the common consequences of perceived organizational support are high organizational commitment (Claudia, 2018; Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, & Sowa, 1986), fostered engagement (Amri & Putra, 2020; Karatepe & Aga, 2016; Meric, Ozturk, & Yurtal, 2019), higher organizational citizenship behavior (Afsar & Badir, 2016), and higher organizational identification (Zorlu, Avan, & Baytok, 2019). However, most of the previous studies determined the direct relationship between perceived organizational support as an independent variable and a dependent variable, while few studies considered that perceived organizational support moderates the relationship between the independent variable and the dependent variable. This creates a gap in whether perceived organizational support may influence the relationship between innate psychological needs and employee engagement. Hence, it is appropriate to conduct research to examine the role of perceived organizational support as a moderator variable. The existence of perceived organizational support needs to be tested to determine whether it will strengthen or weaken the innate psychological needs and employee engagement. Thus, this research also attempts to extend the literature by examining whether perceived organizational support moderates the relationship between innate psychological needs and employee engagement.

## **1.5 Research Questions**

Based on the discussion as presented in the previous sections, this research attempts to answer the following research questions:

1. Do innate psychological needs (job autonomy, social status, perceived employer brand, and psychological ownership) have a significant and