

## **Gender Differences in Employee Attrition at the Durban University of Technology and perceptions on Talent Management Strategies**

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### **Abstract**

Employee attrition is a critical issue facing many organisations including higher education institutions. With the outbreak of the Coronavirus disease, employee attrition rate has accelerated across universities in South Africa and Durban University of Technology is not exempted. The role of human resource management functions becomes vital at such critical time. The study examines the gender differences in employee attrition and the perceptions on the talent management strategies at DUT. The study adopted a quantitative research approach and collected data from the university's database for the period 2018-2022. A descriptive data analysis using SPSS was conducted depicting the gender differences in the attrition rate at DUT. The findings of the study show that, (i) female employees are exiting the institution employment when compared to their counterpart, (ii) the institutions talent management strategies are work in progress. Furthermore, the study findings gave insight into an important practical implication needed by universities for an effective implementation of retention policies and practices especially in achieving the SDG of gender balancing. The study is limited to data collected within DUT and the findings cannot be used for generalization. The study is deemed important in addressing the increasing employee attrition rates and contributes to the on-going discourse in gender related issues facing higher education institution.

**Keywords:** Gender; Employee attrition; Talent management; Higher Education Institution; South Africa.

**JEL classifications:** I23; O15; J63

### **1. Introduction**

The greater part the 21st century has shown increasing rate of employee attrition. The outbreak of the Coronavirus pandemic which triggered changes in work and workplace environment has not helped matters as labour market continues to witness high number of employees' turnover, in which the media (COMEVO, 2021) termed "the Great Resignation or Turnover Tsunami". The phenomenon has become a global problem spreading across sectors of industries. The higher education institutions (HEIs) and, that of South Africa are not exempted and had followed the pandemic trend of employees leaving their jobs. In fact, The Conversation (2021), coined the alarming rate of staff turnover in South African HEIs a 'tide'. The Chronicles of Higher Education (2021) noted that never has higher education institutions experienced such exodus of employee attrition. The increasing pace of attrition which reflects across HEIs practices and processes makes it critical as a focus of research because of its social, psychological, and economic downsides for the employees and the institutions. This is on the precepts that employees are the major determinant factor in the success of every organisation

in today's competitive business environment. The strengths of institutions lie on the capability of its human resources, which presupposes a philosophy of valuing and investing on employees. In this vein, the ability to recruit, engage, and retain the workforce is vital for the long-term health and success of organisations as noted by (Rombaut and Guerry, 2019). Nonetheless, knowledge retention becomes a primary element driving institutions, thus the importance of the human resource factor in attaining and realising the organisational goals remains a core business strategy. Thus, employee retention remains crucial for the continued relevance of HEIs.

It seems appropriate to state from the onset that this study is published in the context of what Yoo et al. (2022:2) have called "these days of anticipation of the end of COVID-19". COVID-19 has caused tremendous impacts on organizations as well as on employees' health, life, and work. Many scholars are already re-imagining the world beyond Covid-19 while others are drawing lessons from the pandemic (Goebel et al. 2022). Thus, Mahat and Kagan (2022) advise that since the COVID-19 is hopefully coming to an end, a review of the pandemic's longer-term impact on higher education, both locally and internationally, is needed. Thus, the current study echoes the above call from Mahat and Kagan (2022) as it aims to examine the gender differences in employee attrition and the implications for talent management. Employee attrition is a common phenomenon that affects many organizations and academic institutions are not exempted. In fact, according to the existing literature, the high rate of faculty attrition has become a growing concern for many academic institutions (Tettey, 2006; Samuel and Chipunza, 2013; Sharma and Chaturvedi, 2017). Scholars have further emphasized the disparity in gender attrition among academics when assessing attribution differences between female and male academics and most importantly when probing the factors that influence this phenomenon (Deutsch and Yao, 2014; Webber and Rogers, 2018). The strength of an organization heavily depends on the intellectual abilities and performance of its employees. Consequently, the inability to retain skilled staff can be detrimental to organizations. Having talented, engaged, and committed staff is indeed imperative for the sustainability and competitiveness of organizations.

Rooted in organizational psychology and behavior, employee attrition is generally defined as the reduction or loss of staff due to retirement, death, or resignation (Jain and Nayyar, 2018). Moreover, this phenomenon is considered by many scholars as a form of voluntary turnover whose causes are attributed to structural and psychological factors (Al-Darraji et al. 2021; Yahia et al. 2021). Inability to manage skilled employees has been identified among the causes of Faculty attrition (Mehta, 2012; Shukla and Shinde, 2019). The disastrous effects of the Covid-19 pandemic have sparked a lot of interest among scholars, as evidenced by multiple studies of the pandemic's effect on the workplace (Marzullo, 2020; Fullard and Zuccollo, 2021). With the on-going 'Turnover Tsunami' ravaging the HEIs, it is important to understand its gender representations and the implications for talent management in academic institutions. Therefore, this study aims to assess gender differences in employee attrition at the Durban University of Technology as well as the perceptions on the talent management strategies being applied at the institution. The expected added value of the above-stated aim is twofold. On one hand, it can contribute to addressing the lack of or inappropriate talent management strategies, as highlighted by the existing literature (Mehta, 2012; Shukla and Shinde, 2019). On the other hand, it can help institutions to be proactive in the monitoring and probing of staff attrition, bearing in mind that the exodus of employees can compromise the quality of education and incur financial costs related to the recruitment of new staff (Mehta, 2012). The study therefore is aimed at highlighting gender differences in employee attrition at Durban University of Technology and analyzing the perception of employees on selected institution's talent management strategies. Thus, the two research questions posed for the study are: What are the gender differences in employee attrition at Durban University of Technology? and how does

DUT staff perceive the institution's talent management strategies?

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Overview of Employee attrition**

Alduayj and Rajpoot (2018) define employee attrition as the loss of employees due to numerous reasons such as low job satisfaction, personal reasons, uncondusive working environment and other factors. According to Frye, Boomhower, Smith, Vitovsky, and Fabricant (2018), there are two categories of employee attrition namely, voluntary and involuntary attrition. Voluntary attrition occurs when high performing employees decide to leave the organization on their own will despite the company's attempt to retain them. Involuntary attrition occurs when employees are terminated by their employer for various reasons such as business requirements or low employee performance. Consequently, this study will focus mostly on voluntary attrition. Employee attrition is a costly challenge faced by many organizations, and institutions of higher learning are no exception. In order to remain competitive, organizations should continuously minimize employee attrition (Yang and Islam, 2020). Studies conducted by Mueller, Gaudilliere, Kin, Menorca and Girod, (2016), confirmed that employee attrition is high in higher education institutions particularly in Science, Technology and Mathematics (STEM) disciplines. High employee attrition is a costly phenomenon that can be a signal of an unhealthy and underperforming organization (Qureshi, 2021).

### **2.2 Gender and employee attrition: Insight into higher education institutions**

A study conducted by Kowal et al. (2020) confirms that women have recorded high stress levels during the COVID-19 pandemic and have fared more than their male counterparts and they have been forced to juggle more. It has been argued that gender play a role in turnover behaviors because women faculty members are likely to be delayed in tenure and promotion, therefore, more prone to leave before gaining tenure. The contextual factors impact personal turnover intention through the intermediation of socio-psychological variables such as perceived fairness, commitment, and job satisfaction. Malhotra and Gautam (2016) argue that women in higher education have a higher attrition rate than males in public institutions. However, Chen, Liu and Kim (2022) reveal that tenured men are more likely to leave a position than tenured women, and gender made no difference for non-tenured faculty members. Umpierrez (2021) also found that non-tenured women showed a stronger intention to leave than men due to low satisfaction with job security. There are many unanswered questions as well. For example, it remains unclear how teaching and research productivity impacts male and female faculty attrition behaviors differently even though gender disparity in teaching and research has been found in a few studies (Agrawal, Madsen, Lall, and Zeida, 2020).

### **2.3 Talent Management**

Despite a plethora of research in recent years, talent management remains one of the main challenges facing many of today's organizations. It is without a doubt that globalization, the changing economy and demographics; the high demand for goods and services, and increased competition have all triggered the war for talent. Moreover, the challenges brought about by the covid-19 pandemic in the management of talent cannot be ignored (Aguinis and Burgi-Tian, 2021). Hence, Fernandez et al. (2022) state, "The Gods must be crazy!" when assessing the challenges related to global talent management during the Covid-19 pandemic. Having skilled employees is not only a source of competitive advantage but also an HR business strategy for the sustainability of an organization.

#### **2.3.1 Conceptualization of Talent Management**

Before delineating the concept ‘talent management’, it is important to understand the meaning of talent. In the organizational context, there is no unanimity as to who is considered as ‘talent’. This can pose a challenge for organizations to fully embrace and implement talent management. Talent was firstly denoted to refer to a unit of weight or money in the Ancient Greek World (Barkhuizen, 2015:4). Some scholars define ‘talent’ as top-performing, high-potential employees. Morgan and Jardin (2010:24) refer to top talent as employees who consistently exceed expectations while displaying the right behaviours. For Bussin (2014:46), talent refers to “those individuals who make a difference to organizational performance, either through their immediate contribution or, in the longer-term, by demonstrating the highest levels of potential”. Gallardo-Gallardo et al. (2013:291) argue that: “It appears that talent can mean whatever a business leader or writer wants it to mean, since everyone has his or her own idea of what the construct does and does not encompass”. However, given the above connotations, it can be assumed that talent alludes to those skilled employees who make a significant impact in an organization, add value and enhance the organization’s competitiveness. Consequently, organizations ought to manage these key resourceful employees with optimum care.

Thus, Talent Management refers to a process that ensures that “an organization has access to human capital capacity in terms of skills, competence, capability and leadership” (Bussin, 2014). According to Mathew (2015), Talent Management is an approach for organizations to attract, develop and retain people with the required skills to help meet the organization’s objectives. Talent management is a strategic approach that focuses on four main areas, namely talent attraction, development, evaluation and retention (Truss et al. 2012). Talent attraction is mainly concerned with the acquisition and the maintenance of skilled employees; while talent development seeks to find methods to continuously maximize talent capabilities. Talent evaluation involves assessing talent management effectiveness and talent retention, which involves mechanisms and strategies to encourage talent to remain within the organization (Truss et al. 2012).

### **2.3.2 Talent Management Strategies**

Talent management strategies can be defined as methods or approaches that organizations used to acquire, develop, evaluate and retain skilled employees in order to optimize their performance. organizations used various strategies to manage high potential employees. These include among others, compensation and rewards, work environment, work-life balance, career management, training and development (Gohari et al. 2013; Armstrong, 2014; Gagné and Howard, 2016; Gharib et al. 2017). However, four of these strategies discussed below were deemed relevant for this research paper.

#### **2.3.2.1 Career Development**

Greenhaus and Callanan (2012) define career development as a process by which employees better understand, develop and monitor career goals and strategies. Bingöl (2006) posits that both the employees and the organization have responsibilities in career development. The employee has the responsibility to identify and plan his/her career while the organization has to provide and implement strategies to facilitate the career management of the employee in line with the organizational needs.

Career development can be beneficial for both the employee and the organization. Its aim is to match the employee’s objectives with the organization’s needs. Hence, Dawson and Phillips (2013) assert that career development enables employee career success while providing sustainability in the organization. Armstrong (2014) affirms that development programs are an important component of talent management which mostly aims at enhancing the skills and competencies of employees. The career management of skilled employees is also strategy

organizations use to provide an incentive to meet talent needs in order to enhance their motivation to follow the organization's direction (McGrath, 2008). Scholars contend that high-caliber employees are attracted by organizations that have a sound career management system (Colling and Mellahi, 2009; Dries, 2013). Piansoongnem et al. (2011) affirm that employees want to stay in an environment where talent management planning supports their career development. Likewise, Waheed and Zaim (2015) found that career planning that includes talent management yields positive outcomes for both the organization and the employees. Malaeb and Garavan (2013) also noted the significant role that talent management plays in individual career development. Highly skilled employees join an organization with career prospects and expectations (Waheed et al. 2012). These employees are more interested in non-monetary rewards like career perspectives, challenging assignments and promotion (Gandossy and Kao, 2004; Ready et al. 2008). Thus, it is advisable that organizations implement a combination of career development strategies that include promotions, multidisciplinary project teams, lateral moves, special assignments, development positions, career bridges, mentoring, coaching, career workshops, and succession planning (Hirsh and Carter, 2002 in Armstrong and Taylor 2014). Furthermore, Bersin (2010) presents career management at the center of the New Talent Management Framework, advocating that performance management issues, continuity management, talent mobility, development plans and leadership development should encompass a formal and transparent process in organizations to help employees develop their own careers.

### **2.3.2.2 Remuneration**

It is hypothesized that remuneration and rewards have a significant influence on employee motivation, satisfaction and retention (Vroom, 1964; Ready et al. 2008; Kusnin and Rasdi, 2014). Remuneration and non-monetary rewards are important factors to consider in the management of talent. Remuneration can be in various forms, such as in the form of monetary incentives that employees receive in a set period, or in the form of non-monetary rewards such as life insurance and pension benefits, sick leave pay, medical aids, subsidized meals, transport allowances, etc. (Gohari et al. 2013). The Expectancy Theory assumes that people join an organization with expectations to be accordingly rewarded for their effort (Vroom, 1964). Given the War for Talent, not being at the edge of acquiring and retaining highly skilled individuals can be detrimental for an organization. It is without doubt that employees are the backbone of any successful organization and skilled employees add value. Consequently, it will be difficult for an organization to succeed without the motivation and commitment of its current and potential employees.

The Talent Attraction and Retention model posits that skilled individuals are attracted by competitive pay (Ready et al. 2008); and compensation and benefits moderated by intrinsic rewards influence the retention of talent (Kusnin et al. 2014). Various empirical studies confirmed that monetary and non-monetary remuneration strongly influence employees' job satisfaction and retention (Bussin and Van Rooy, 2014; Asamoah and Eugene, 2016; Banerjee and Nayak, 2018). Furthermore, the study by Gohari et al. (2013) revealed that effective rewards have a direct effect on employee performance.

Given the complexity and the challenges associated with the remuneration of talent, organizations should ensure that they analyze their employees' needs and aspirations in order to provide attractive rewards. Thus, organizations are advised to benchmark and adopt variable pay structures and incentives to adequately remunerate their talent.

### **2.3.2.3 Training and Development**

The 21<sup>st</sup> century is characterized by a knowledge economy where acquiring talented and highly knowledgeable employees is a source of competitive advantage. Training and development improve employees' skills and enhances their capabilities, knowledge, attitudes and behaviour (Botha et al. 2013). Consequently, Noe et al. (2012: 271) contend that training should be a continuous process and planned effort of an organization to facilitate the learning of job-related skills, competencies, knowledge and behaviours of its employees. Downs (2012) claims that training and development programs are important key aspects of the talent management process. High potential employees are inclined to remain with an organization that provides training and development opportunities. Kusnin and Rasdi's (2014:342) Talent Retention Model assumes that training and development are amongst the main factors influencing the intention to stay. Various scholars affirmed that training and development have a significant impact on talent retention (Dresner et al. 2014; Gharib et al. 2017). Thus, Nilsson and Ellström (2012) compel organizations to provide training and development activities such as coaching, mentoring and assigning challenging jobs, etc. that further maximize talents' capabilities.

### **2.3.2.4 Work environment**

Providing a flexible, pleasant and resourceful working environment is among the concerns for organizations in the management of talent. People would like to work in a conducive environment that caters for their physical and psychological well-being. Nyamubarwa (2013) contends that the physical work environment encompassing geographical location and the ergonomic setting, as well as the psychological work environment that include workload, perception of fairness, policies, procedures, culture, collegiality and leadership style are important factors to consider in the management of talents. Kontoghiorghes's (2016) Talent Attraction and Retention Model assumes that a work environment that promotes open communication, change creativity, respect and integrity has the potential to attract and retain talent. Ashraf and Joarder (2010:171) posit that organisational factors such as leadership style, team cohesiveness, working conditions, organizational culture and policies have a direct effect on the retention of talent. An empirical study conducted by Kossivi et al. (2016) revealed that the availability of resources determines the retention of employees. Gagné and Howard (2016) state that good working conditions that foster high morale, and collegiality, where employees feel a sense of belonging and are empowered to make decisions enhance job satisfaction and influence the intention to stay.

## **2.4 Employee attrition and talent management**

Umpierrez (2021) confirms that employee attrition rate has exacerbated during the Covid-19 pandemic due to growing burnout. Umpierrez (2021) further attests that professors are the ones who are mostly leaving. High attrition can be attributed to employees struggling with their work/life balance thus leading to career dissatisfaction. A survey conducted by Fidelity investments in 2021 revealed that 55% of faculty staff have considered changing careers or retiring early. This is reflected by respondents attesting that stress levels have increased during COVID-19. Consequently, increasing the attrition for most academics.

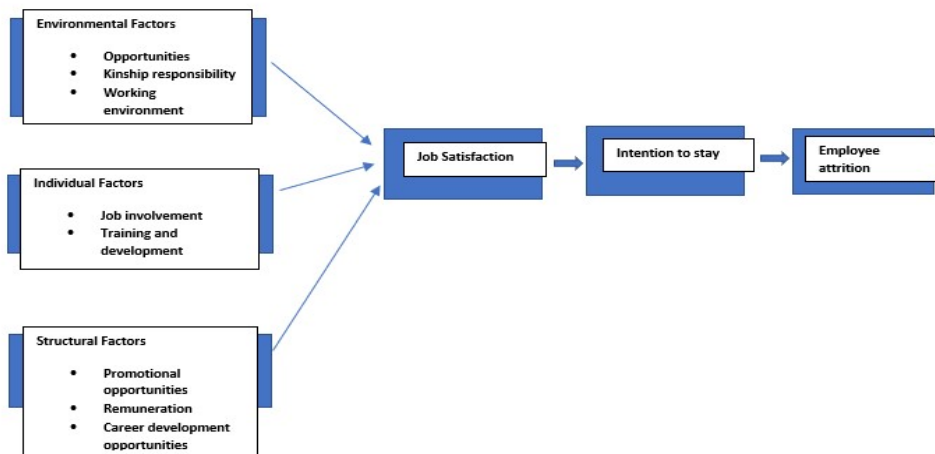
The process of identifying the existing talent in an organization is among the top talent management challenges. Kamath, Jamsandekar, and Naik (2019) posit that talent management involves a lot of managerial decisions to allocate the right people with the right skills. Higher Education institutions need to remain competitive, thus they strive to retain talented individuals. Therefore, different talent retention strategies are implemented by various institutions in order to retain talented individuals. The talent management strategies that might be used to minimize the attrition rate include training and development, effective compensation systems, career

development and formal succession planning (Kravariti and Johnston, 2020).

### 2.5. Theoretical Framework of the Study

According to Barkhuizen and Gumede (2021), talent management plays an essential role in employee retention. On the other hand, retention is driven by an individual’s intention to stay. There is a wealth of literature suggesting that the antecedents of employees’ turnover intention are multifactorial problems. Mozaffari, Rahimi, Yazdani, and Sohrabi (2022), concurred that turnover intention which indicates an employee’s attitudes toward the organization, is a complicated and driven by various principal components. As highlighted by Hayes et al. (2012), turnover intentions may be induced job-related problems, interpersonal, or emanate from the organisation’s characteristics. Given this context, the researchers’ found the Price and Mueller’s causal model of turnover (Figure 1) as a useful framework underpinning the study. This is on the basis that the model addresses intention to stay from exogenous variables which are subdivided into three major groups, namely environment, individual and structural variables.

**Figure 1: Study’s conceptual framework**



Source: Price and Mueller (2001), adapted and modified by the researchers.

Environmental factors relate to non-work setting such as opportunities, kinship responsibilities and working environment. Within the limit of this paper, the available data allowed for the researchers to measure only the work environment as a retention or TM strategy. Hanai (2021) attributes work environment to constructs relating to such as communication, stress, work pressure, creativity, fairness, recognition, co-worker relation, supervisor relation, control over work, flexible working, performance appraisal, working conditions, responsibility for the job, supervision, job security, work itself, organization reputation, policies and administration, etc. The scholar added that the attributes of the organisations’ work environment influence employee retention (Hanai 2021).

The individual component of the model constitutes general training and development, job involvement, positive- and negative affectivity. Al Mamun and Hasan (2017) demonstrated in their study how individual factors directly influence turnover intention or indirectly affect them through the rule of other variables. Training and development, an element of individual factor, tested within the scope of this study is a crucial for talent retention. Research studies have shown that training and development have considerable

effects on employees staying in the organisation (Al Mamun & Hasan 2017) and trained and developed employees are satisfied with their jobs which, consequently, minimizes employee attrition Kanyumba (2022).

The structural factors include elements such as autonomy justice, job stress, remuneration, promotional chances, repetitiveness of work, career development and social support (Price, 2001). Price and Mueller (2001) further indicate that remuneration (compensation) and career development amongst others reduce turnover due to their positive impact on job satisfaction. In addition, Vignesh, Sarojini and Vetrivel (2018) concluded that the neglect of career development opportunities will lead to employee dissatisfaction which in turn will lead to employee attrition.

In summary, the Price and Mueller causal model of turnover shows clearly its influences on employee's intention to stay or leave a workplace. The South African higher education has been faced with the challenge of poor working conditions which has led to many employees opting to switch to the industry, especially in the private sector (Lindathaba-Nkadimene, 2020), thus the need for an effective talent management strategy.

### **3. Research Method**

#### **3.1 Study procedure**

According to Žukauskas, Vveinhardt and Andriukaitienė, (2018), research methodology entails a combination of different techniques used by the scientists to explore different situations. This study adopts a positivist research philosophy to provide an explanation for any causal relationships with the constructs (Park, Konge and Artino 2020; Ponterotto, 2005). Similarly, a descriptive research design helps the researchers to study the characteristics of the population, identify problems within population or the organisation (Siedlecki, 2020), and the associated events leading to the problem. Furthermore, the study is primarily based on secondary quantitative data obtained from the DUT HR database.

#### **3.2 Study population and sample**

The target population also considered the sample size were in two folds. Data for addressing the gender differences in employee attrition was collected from 190 employees who exited the institutions employment over a five-year period (2018-2022). This time dimension is considered due to the University's intense drive towards its strategic plan called Envision 2030. The inclusion criterion for selecting the sample size was on voluntary exit while employees who left the employment because of retirement, involuntary attrition (forced exit) etc. were excluded.

For eliciting information on the employees' perception of the institution's TMS currently being implemented, available data from the university database was collected from 31 respondents over a period of two-years (2021-2022). The quantitative data collected for both research objectives were analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Scientists (SPSS) software version 27 and findings presented in the form of descriptive statistics.

#### **3.3 Ethical Procedure**

The researchers obtained ethical approval from the University's Institution Research and Ethics Committee.



## 4. Statistical Presentation of the Results

The statistical results of the tests are presented using chart and tables. First the reliability of the questionnaire as well as the study is presented followed by the test of the research objectives.

### 4.1. Test of Reliability

The test of the reliability of the study is measured by conducting a Cronbach Alpha test and the result is presented in Table 1.

**Table (1):** Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized items	N of items
0.857	0.856	4

Source: prepared by the researchers from SPSS output

The Cronbach Alpha value of 0.856 (Table 1) falls within the acceptable threshold of 0.7 to 0.95 (Cronbach 1951; Taber, 2018), indicating that the sample test items are interrelated, and reliable. Furthermore, the researchers measured the correlation on every TMS item with each other to understand the relationship between the responses as presented in Tables 2 and 3 respectively.

**Table (2):** Inter-Item Correlation Matrix

	Opportunity for career development	Remuneration Package	Training and development	Working environment
Opportunity for career development	1.000	0.564	0.744	0.654
Remuneration Package	0.564	1.000	0.747	0.415
Training and development	0.744	0.747	1.000	0.459
Working environment	0.654	0.415	0.459	1.000

Source: prepared by the researchers from SPSS output

The correlation value of every item is positive and strong with each other. The closer the values are to 1, the stronger the relationship between the responses. A summary of the item statistics is presented in Table 3.

**Table (3):** Item-Total Statistics

Demographic Factors	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Squared Multiple Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
Opportunity for career development	8.3871	7.978	0.780	0.678	0.783
Remuneration Package	8.4839	8.458	0.670	0.566	0.831
Training and development	8.2903	8.080	0.789	0.716	0.780
Working environment	8.3226	9.759	0.573	0.439	0.866

Source: prepared by the researchers from SPSS output

Considering Table 3, column 3, each TMS item is strongly correlated with other items grouped together. Thus, the research instrument measured what it was intended to.

### 4.2 Gender differences in employee attrition

The gender demographic distribution of the respondents is presented in Table 4.

**Table (4):** Descriptive statistics on gender distribution

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent	Mean	Std. Deviation
						1.88	0.725
Valid	Male	62	32.6	32.6	32.6		
	Female	88	46.3	46.3	78.9		
	Neutral	40	21.1	21.1	100.0		
	Total	190	100.0	100.0			

Source: prepared by the researchers from SPSS output

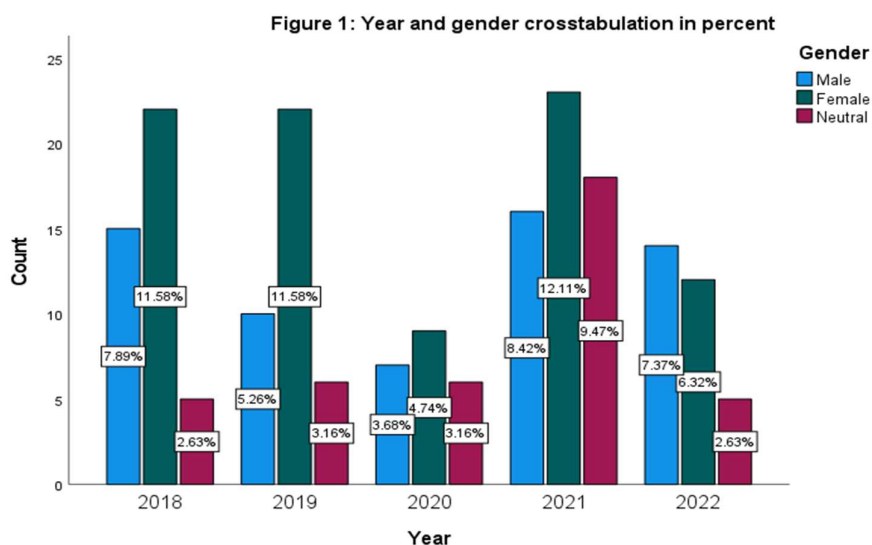
Of the 190 respondents who exited the institution’s employment, Table 4 indicates that while 32.6% of them are males, 46.3% are females. A crosstabulation was performed across a 5-year period under study to examine the gender related trend in attrition and the result is presented in Table 5 and Figure 1.

**Table (5):** Year and gender crosstabulation

Count	Gender	Year					Total
		2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	
	Male	15	10	7	16	14	62
	Female	22	22	9	23	12	88
	Neutral	5	6	6	18	5	40
	Total	42	38	22	57	31	190

Source: prepared by the researchers from SPSS output

Table 5 presents the number of female and male employees who exited the institution’s employment over a 5-year under study.



Data from Table 5 and Figure 1, clearly show that for each of the years examined (except for 2022- NB: available data up to second quarter of the year.), the percentage of female employees who exited the institution is higher than that of the males.

### 4.3 Respondents' Perceptions of the Institution's TMS

The talent management strategies (TMS) employed at the institution and tested in this study are career development, remuneration, training and development and work environment. To measure the perception of the respondents on the quality of TMS applied in the institution, the researchers used closed-ended questions and response options provided in a 5-Likert scale format from 'Poor, Fair, Good, Very good to Excellent'. In collapsing the responses, 'good, very good and excellent' were grouped together while 'poor and fair' were merged on the assumption that the response 'fair', has a negative sentiment. Available data was collected over a 2-year period (2021 to 2022) and only 31 staff members who exited the institution's employment participated in the survey. The results are presented accordingly in Table 6.

**Table (6): Perceptions on the Institutions TM Strategies**

Items		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Career development	Poor	4	12.9	12.9	12.9
	Fair	10	32.3	32.3	45.2
	Good	9	29.0	29.0	74.2
	Very good	5	16.1	16.1	90.3
	Excellent	3	9.7	9.7	100.0
	Total	31	100.0	100.0	
Remuneration	Poor	6	19.4	19.4	19.4
	Fair	8	25.8	25.8	45.2
	Good	9	29.0	29.0	74.2
	Very good	6	19.4	19.4	93.5
	Excellent	2	6.5	6.5	100
	Total	31	100.0	100.0	
Training and development	Poor	4	12.9	12.9	12.9
	Fair	7	22.6	22.6	35.5
	Good	12	38.7	38.7	74.2
	Very Good	5	16.1	16.1	90.3
	Excellent	3	9.7	9.7	100.0
	Total	31	100.0	100	
Working Environment	Poor	3	9.7	9.7	9.7
	Fair	9	29.0	29.0	38.7
	Good	10	32.3	32.3	71.0
	Very good	8	25.8	25.8	96.8
	Excellent	1	3.2	3.2	100.0
	Total	31	100.0	100.0	

Source: prepared by the researchers from SPSS output

Data from Table 6 shows that 54.8% (29, 16.1 and 9.7) of the responds believed that the institution provides opportunity for career growth. While 32.3% rated the opportunity for career development in the institution fair and 12.9% of the respondents believed otherwise.

On the use of remuneration as a talent management strategy, data shows that 54.9% (29, 19.4 and 6.5) of the respondents rated the institution well, 25.8% do not completely believe so while 19.4% completely considered it poor.

Data from Table 6 shows that 64.5% of the respondents believe that the institution does well in staff training and development. Again, while 22.6% of the respondents shows that the institution tries in using T&D as a talent management strategy, 12.9% rated it poor. On the institution's work environment, 61.3% of the respondents seemed reasonably fine with it, 29% considered it fair while 9.7% believed it is poor.

## 5. Discussion

Data from Table 1 indicates that more female employees (46.3% against 32.6% males) exited the institution's employment over a 5-year period examined. A crosstabulation from Table 2, shows that for each of the period studied (except for the fifth year), more female exited per year compared to their male counterpart. This also reflected in Figure 1 with yearly percent of female employees who exited the institution's employment seemed higher than that of males when combined over the 5-year period. Bartels et al. (2021), acknowledged similar trend in their study describing the attrition of female employees in academia as a leaky pipeline, which has called for greater concern in the field of human resource management, according to Coetzee & Moosa (2020). Kanyumba and Lourens (2021) attributed the increasing attrition rate to the inability of HE institutions to recruit, retain and promote females in academia. The trend is not only peculiar to the institution researched or higher education generally but goes beyond. A recent article published in 'The Globe and Mail', (2021), examining the trend in over 499 public and private organisations in Canada, the researchers found that while firms are hiring female employees, on average, little is being done to retain them. Employee retention has remained a challenge facing organisations today. A wide range of talent management exists which organisations apply in an attempt to retain its employees. The talent management strategies (TMS) examined within the scope of this study are career development, remuneration, training and development and work environment. The findings of the study complements and correlates with similar studies but also contradicts some of the previous reports and research done within the space.

**Career development:** the findings from the study revealed a mixed feelings as the data showed 54.8% of the respondents attested to having the opportunity for career development within the institution, while 45.2% were skeptical about it. The latter is quite worrying and shows elements of shortfall because a well-planned and effective career development strategy would not provide room for skepticism. This finding throw light into other scholars' emphasis on the need for career development in the South African higher education sector. Lesenyeho et al. (2018), in their study found career development as the main factor relating to talent attraction in South African HEIs. Similar studies have noted the need for HEIs to improve on staff career development opportunities through mentorship, networking, transnational collaboration and promotion (Coldwell et al. 2016; Thomas et al. 2015). A good investment on such opportunities would increase staff happiness, affective commitment leading to an intention to stay (Muleya et al. 2022; Saurombe and Barkhuizen 2022; Kubiak 2020).

**Remuneration:** data revealed that while 54.9% of the respondents attested positively to the institution's remuneration package, 45.2% showed levels of dissatisfaction. This finding shows moderate levels of satisfaction and aligns closely with Barkhuizen et al. (2020) who found slight satisfaction on the use of remuneration as a TM strategy in the South African HEI. In other similar studies, Musakuro (2022), found participants clearly unsatisfied with the compensation package being implemented at the South African HEI sampled in the study. Though, the latter contradicts the finding of this study, the authors believe that moderate levels of satisfaction with compensation practices would limit

talent retention. This is acknowledged by Barkhuizen et al. (2020) who noted that compensation and recognition as well as institutional practices have the largest effect on employees' intention to quit their jobs.

Staff training and development: the data showed a greater consensus with 64.5% of the respondents acknowledging positively towards training and development initiatives being implemented at the institution, though did not augur well with a good percentage (35.5%) of the respondents. This finding correlates with Musakuro (2022), study who found majority of the participants attested positively to their institutions training and development programmes. This is understandable as the changes in the HEI environment becomes intense, the need for continuous learning and development becomes imminent. Such programmes broaden an individual knowledge and skills base and long-term growth to fulfil one's potential (Warnich et al. 2018).

The institutions working environment was considered conducive by 61.3% of the respondents while 38.7% attested negatively to it. The finding concurs with Portnoi (2015) study on the positive nature of the South African HEIs environment, though the author pointed to some other push factors deemed imperative for continuous focus on improving the work environment.

A closer look at the findings on each of the tested constructs show that slightly above half of the respondents attested positively to the institution's talent management strategies. This shows that the talent management strategies being applied at DUT is a work-in-progress. The findings call for a need for improvement as most modern-day organisations' aim towards perfection across its functions, activities, processes and procedures. Studies have shown that effective application of talent management strategies increases employees' retention which invariably influences positive organizational outcome such as performance and productivity. Researchers have established a significant positive relationship between career development and employee retention (Houssein, Singh, and Arumugam, 2020; Mule, Rintari and Moguche 2020; Al-sharafi, Hassan, and Alam, 2018). Various studies have attested that remuneration is vital to employees and has imperative relationship with retention (Hanai and Pallangyo, 2020; Onochie, 2020; Bibi, Pangil, Johari, and Ahmad, 2017). Similarly, studies have also shown a close link between training and development and employee retention. Nguyen and Duong (2021) in their study found a positive correlation between training and development and employee retention; Dietz and Zwick (2022), assert that employers can achieve higher productivity and increased retention using training and development, while Elsafty and Oraby (2022) in their study established that training and development positively impacts employee retention. Further studies on organisational work environment and employee retention showed a strong link between the two (Xuecheng et al. 2022; Anonymous, 2022; Hanai, 2021; Salau, et al. 2020). Arguably, these studies have underpinned the need for an effective application of talent management strategies in an organization. Musakuro and De Klerk (2021) also attested to some of the tested constructs in this study affecting the talent management practices of the South African HEIs. The SABPP cited in Meyer (2022), notes that of the 13 HR standards, the worst performance area is talent management, thus the call for South African managers and universities to prioritize TM in their organisations. Saurombe and Barkhuizen (2022), also noted the need for HEIs to invest in employee-centric talent retention practices for sustained academic workforce development and retention. It is believed that effective application of the talent management strategies at DUT would help in retaining the employees especially females who are mostly exiting the institutions' employment.

## 6. Conclusion and recommendation

Employee attrition has always been a challenging process especially in this post-Covid-19 era and has remained one of the most important issues facing HR professionals today, due to its detrimental effect to organisational survival. The study attempted to examine the gender differences in staff attrition at DUT and the perceptions of the institution's talent management practices. The findings of the study show that for each of the years examined, and for the overall 5-year period under study, female employees at DUT had exited the employment more than their male counterpart. This is very worrisome given that a diverse workforce is considered a great asset for every institution. Various studies have attested to females being well focused, organized and more productive at work which should not be overlooked. Again, the authors explored the views of the respondents on the talent management strategies being applied at the institution, specifically, career development, remuneration package, training and development and working environment. The findings revealed that these TM strategies were perceived at average performance, an indication for improvement. Given the challenges that Covid-19 pandemic had posed to the world of work and the global talent management war, it is important for institutions to adopt the best practices in managing and retaining its employees. This implies that to retain talented employees, it is imperative to adopt retention strategies tailored to the institutions' background and context. The study's shortfall stemmed from the fact that the research instrument was not designed to elicit information specifically on gender related reasons for exiting the institution despite the average positive views of the respondents on the institution's TMS. Thus, the need for further research on the reasons for the increasing attrition rate of female employees at DUT.

The authors put forward the following recommendations:

- The institution needs to explore policy interventions aimed at attracting and retaining female employees.
- Because the TMS being implemented at DUT are found to be work-in-progress, it is therefore crucial for the institution executive management to tailor TMS to the needs of their employees, especially females.
- Reassessment of the existing policies on talent management strategies is deemed necessary to investigate and understand the shortfalls and for HR planning processes.

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## Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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