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Career Management Practices and Staff Retention: Evidence from Public Universities in the Central Region of Uganda

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Abstract:
Career management is increasingly becoming an important talent management tool for improving staff retention and stability. In Uganda, public universities have tried different approaches to reduce staff turnover, but there is little empirical evidence about how well these efforts work. Even though the government has enhanced salaries for university staff, these institutions still experience notable turnover rates estimated at 35%. This study therefore examined the effect of career management on staff retention in public universities in Central Uganda. The study employed an explanatory cross-sectional survey design with quantitative approach for data collection. Total of 346 respondents took part in the study both academic and administrative staff. Data were analysed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). The Model revealed good fit indices (CFI = 0.956, TLI = 0.951, PNFI = 0.892, RMSEA = 0.048, SRMR = 0.062. Findings revealed that career development practices had was the strongest predictor of staff retention (β = 0.472, t-value = 7.917, p-value < 0.000), followed by career management policies (β = 0.360, t = 4.175, p < 0.000), and the least predictor was career planning (β = 0.172, t = 3.576, p = 0.001). The study concluded that all the three predictors of staff retention have a positive and significant effect on staff retention in public universities. The study recommends that public universities should institutionalise structured career planning by supporting staff to identify career goals and progression pathways. Universities should prioritise career development through regular training, postgraduate study support, mentoring, coaching, leadership development, and clear career advancement opportunities, as these have the greatest influence on staff retention.

Keywords: Career Management, Staff Retention, Public Universities, Uganda.

INTRODUCTION

Higher education institutions globally are increasingly recognising the strategic importance of retaining talented employees to sustain academic excellence and organisational performance. Staff retention has become a critical concern for public universities in Uganda due to increasing competition for skilled academic and administrative personnel, limited financial resources, and growing international mobility of talent. Persistent staff turnover disrupts teaching, research productivity, institutional memory, and service delivery. Career management has emerged as a strategic human resource management practice that requires investing in talent management practices that support employees' long-term career growth and commitment (De Vos et al., 2020).. Career management is widely regarded as a strategic human

resource management practice that enables organisations to attract, develop, motivate, and retain talented employees while supporting long-term organisational performance. The concept has evolved from a narrow focus on promotion and hierarchical career advancement to a broader perspective that emphasizes continuous learning, employability; career sustainability, employee well-being, and shared responsibility for career development (Guest, 2015; Zhao et al., 2022).

Does career management significantly influence staff retention in public universities in Uganda?

Although previous studies have examined talent management, employee development, and retention, limited empirical evidence exists regarding the influence of career management dimensions on staff retention in public universities in Uganda. This study addresses this gap by examining how career planning, career development practices, and career management policies influence staff retention among employees in public universities.

BACKGROUND

Organizations operating in today's knowledge-based economy depend increasingly on skilled employees to achieve and sustain competitive advantage. This is particularly true in knowledge-intensive sectors such as higher education, where institutional performance relies heavily on the expertise, commitment, and continuity of academic and administrative staff (Barney, 1991; Becker, 1993). As a result, retaining talented staff has become a central concern for human resource management. High staff turnover not only results in the loss of institutional knowledge but also increases recruitment and training costs, disrupts productivity, and weakens organisational performance (Allen et al., 2010; Hom et al., 2017).

These challenges have encouraged organisations to move beyond retention strategies that rely mainly on financial rewards and instead invest in talent management practices that support employees' long-term career growth and commitment (De Vos et al., 2020). Career management is one of such practice. It helps organisations align employees' career aspirations with institutional objectives through career planning, career development practices, and career management policies that promote professional development, mentoring, career progression, promotion, and succession planning (Akkermans et al., 2020; De Vos et al., 2019).

Recent research shows that organisations with well-developed career management systems generally retain employees more successfully than those that depend on isolated HR initiatives or financial incentives alone. Employees increasingly expect opportunities for career planning, continuous learning, mentoring, transparent promotion procedures, and clearly defined career pathways in addition to competitive pay (Ghosh & Sen Gupta, 2025; Ng et al., 2024). Accordingly, career management is now viewed as a comprehensive human resource strategy that contributes not only to staff retention but also to employee engagement, career sustainability, psychological well-being, leadership continuity, and organisational resilience (De Vos et al., 2020; Fujimoto, 2026). However, existing evidence also suggests that these benefits are strongest when career planning, career development practices, and career management policies are implemented together as an integrated system supported by fair organisational practices, effective leadership, and equal access to career opportunities (Gong et al., 2026; Verbruggen et al., 2019). This is especially relevant in higher education institutions like public universities, where growing international competition, technological advances, and increasing research expectations have made it more difficult to attract and retain experienced academic and professional staff (OECD, 2023; UNESCO, 2024).

These challenges are even more pronounced in Sub-Saharan Africa, where public universities often operate under financial constraints while facing shortages of qualified staff, limited professional development opportunities, delayed promotions, and restricted career advancement (World Bank, 2022; UNESCO, 2024). In Uganda, despite government efforts to improve remuneration and strengthen human resource management, public universities continue to lose experienced academic and administrative staff because of bureaucratic promotion systems, inadequate funding for professional development and inconsistent implementation of career management policies which weaken employees' confidence in their long-term career prospects (National Council for Higher Education, 2023; Ministry of Public Service, 2025). Although career management is widely acknowledged as an important strategy for retaining employees, most empirical evidence comes from developed countries and private-sector organisations. Moreover, previous studies have often examined career planning, career development practices, and career management policies separately rather than as interconnected components of a broader career management system (De Vos et al., 2019; Ng et al., 2024). This study addresses these gaps by examining how these three dimensions collectively influence staff retention in public universities in Central Uganda, thereby extending the literature on career management and staff retention within the context of public universities in Uganda.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Organisations with well-developed career management systems generally retain employees more successfully than those that depend on isolated HR initiatives or financial incentives alone. Employees increasingly expect opportunities for career planning, continuous learning, mentoring, transparent promotion procedures, and clearly defined career pathways in addition to competitive pay (Rothwell, 2024). Even though talent management is gaining attention as a strategic HR approach and the government has increased salaries for staff in Uganda's public universities, these institutions still lose experienced academic and administrative staff (NCHE Report, 2025). This loss affects performance, continuity, and knowledge retention (Ministry of Education Human Resource Report, 2025). Although financial incentives have been widely discussed in policy related to retention, there is little evidence on whether career management mapping helps retain staff in Uganda's public universities. Most existing studies focus on general talent management and are based in different institutions or regions, so the role of career management in public universities in Central Uganda is not well understood. This gap led to the current study, with focus on how career management practices affect staff retention among academic and administrative staff in public universities using structural equation modeling (SEM).

Research Question

Does career management significantly influence staff retention in public universities in Uganda?

Purpose of the study: To examine the effect of Career Management practices on Staff Retention in Public Universities in the Central Region of Uganda.

Objective

The study was guided by the following objectives:

1. To assess the effect of Career Planning on Staff Retention
2. To examine the effect of Career Development Practices on Staff Retention
3. To evaluate the effect of Career Management Policies on Staff Retention

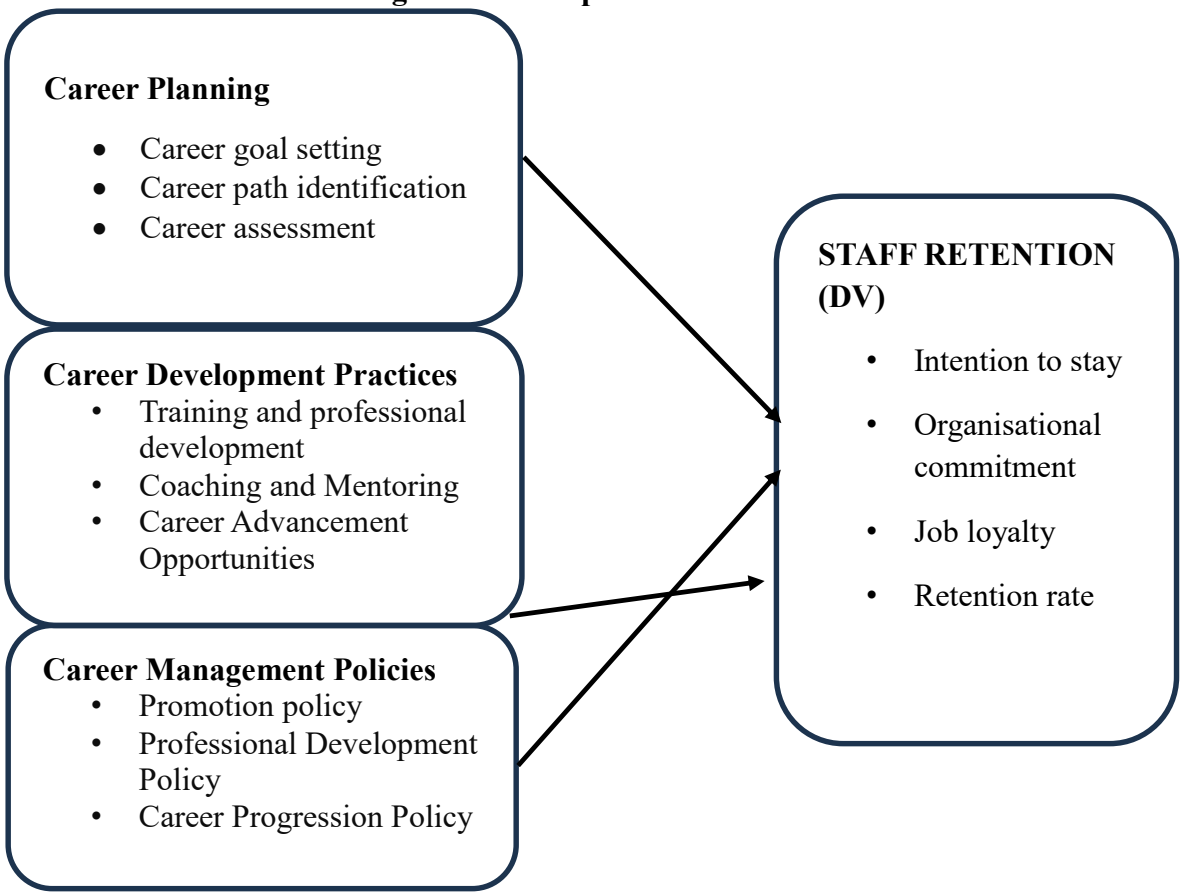
Research Hypothesis

H_1: Career Planning has a positive and significant effect on Staff Retention

H_2: Career Development Practices have a positive and significant effect on Staff Retention
H_3: Career Management Policies have a positive and significant effect on Staff Retention

Conceptual Framework

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework



CAREER MANAGEMENT (IV)

LITERATURE REVIEW

Career Management

Career management is widely regarded as a strategic human resource management (HRM) practice that enables organisations to attract, develop, motivate, and retain talented employees while supporting long-term organisational performance. The concept has evolved from a narrow focus on promotion and hierarchical career advancement to a broader perspective that emphasizes continuous learning, employability, career sustainability, employee well-being, and shared responsibility for career development (Guest, 2015; Zhao et al., 2022). Contemporary scholars define organizational career management as a systematic set of policies, programmes, and practices through which organizations support employees' career growth while building a sustainable pipeline of competent personnel (De Vos et al., 2019; Zhao et al., 2022). This support extends beyond promotion decisions to include developmental mechanisms such as training, mentoring, coaching, and developmental assignments; informational mechanisms including career guidance, feedback, and counselling; and relational mechanisms that enhance networking, visibility, sponsorship, and career opportunities (De Vos et al., 2019). Research further suggests that employees' perceptions of these career management practices

strongly influence career satisfaction, organizational commitment, and retention outcomes (Zhao et al., 2022).

Although there is broad agreement on the strategic importance of career management, debates remain regarding its scope and implementation. One key debate concerns whether responsibility for career development should lie primarily with organisations or employees. While traditional models viewed career progression as an organisational responsibility, contemporary perspectives advocate shared responsibility, with organizations providing supportive career systems and employees proactively managing their own career goals, learning, and adaptability (Guest, 2015).

Staff Retention

Staff retention is now a major issue in human resource management because there is more competition for skilled workers and high costs when employees leave. Organisations spend a lot on hiring, training, and developing staff, so keeping talented employees is key to maintaining performance and staying competitive (Armstrong & Taylor, 2023; Dessler, 2020). In higher education, retention matters even more since academic and administrative staff have unique knowledge and experience that are hard to replace. When experienced staff leave, it can disrupt teaching, research, administration, and the smooth running of the institution, which affects how well the organisation works overall (Nyamboga.,2026). As a result, staff retention has shifted from simply trying to stop people from leaving to a strategic goal focused on creating a workplace where employees want to stay.

Although most researches agree that retention is important, there is still debate about how best to measure it. Some researchers focus on objective data like retention rates, employee tenure, and workforce stability. Other scholars believe that subjective measures, such as intention to stay, commitment, and job loyalty, offer better insight into employees' future decisions (Hom et al., 2017). Recent studies increasingly support the debate using perceptual measures because they reflect employees' attitudes and psychological attachment, which can come before actual turnover. This broader view shows that employees might stay at a company even if they feel little commitment and are thinking about leaving, so psychological indicators are important for understanding retention.

Career Management and Staff Retention

Career management is widely recognised as an important human resource management practice for improving staff retention because it shapes employees' perceptions of career growth, organisational support, and future opportunities. Drawing on Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964), recent literature suggests that employees are more likely to remain with organisations that invest in their professional development through structured career management systems. Rather than encouraging employees to leave after acquiring new skills, career management strengthens organisational commitment, career satisfaction, employee engagement, and perceived organisational support, which in turn reduce turnover intentions (Ng et al., 2024). Contemporary scholars therefore view career management as an integrated system comprising career planning, career development, mentoring, coaching, promotion, succession planning, and continuous learning, all of which provide employees with clear career pathways and greater confidence in their long-term future within the organization (De Vos et al., 2020; Verbruggen et al., 2019).

Although the positive relationship between career management and staff retention is well established, recent research emphasises that its effectiveness depends on how career management practices are implemented. Transparent promotion policies, equitable access to professional development, supportive leadership, mentoring, and regular career discussions strengthen employees' trust in organisational career

systems and increase their intention to remain (Fujimoto, 2026; Ghosh & Sen Gupta, 2025). While career development may enhance employees' external employability, evidence suggests that organisations offering meaningful career progression, fair career policies, and supportive work environments are more likely to retain talented employees despite increased labour market opportunities (Gong et al., 2026; Ng et al., 2024). However, much of the existing evidence comes from developed countries, with limited research examining career management practices and staff retention in African public universities, and Uganda in particular highlighting the need for context-specific studies.

Theoretical Review

Human Capital Theory (Becker & Schultz, 1960)

Human Capital Theory (HCT) views employees' knowledge, skills, competencies, and experience as valuable organizational assets that enhance productivity and long-term organizational performance (Becker & Schultz, 1960; Sweetland, 1996). The theory argues that investments in employee development through education, training, career development, and continuous learning increase employees' capabilities, enabling them to contribute more effectively to organizational goals. From this perspective, career management is a strategic investment in human capital because practices such as career planning, professional development, mentoring, and career progression strengthen employees' competencies while enhancing their long-term value to the organisation. Employees who perceive opportunities for career growth are also more likely to remain with their organizations, making career management an important mechanism for improving staff retention. In this study, HCT provides the theoretical basis for explaining how career management is operationalised through career planning, career development practices, and career management policies which enhances employees' knowledge, skills, and career opportunities, thereby increasing staff commitment and retention in public universities.

Despite its relevance, HCT has been criticised for placing greater emphasis on the economic value of employees while giving limited attention to the psychological, social, and organisational factors that also influence staff retention. Furthermore, evidence linking investments in human capital directly to organisational outcomes remains mixed, as contextual factors such as leadership, organisational support, and the work environment may shape the extent to which career development investments translate into improved retention and performance (Hanushek & Woessmann, 2012). These limitations suggest that HCT alone cannot fully explain why employees choose to remain with an organization, highlighting the need to complement it with theories that consider employees' social and organizational experiences.

Career Planning and Staff Retention

Career planning has become a strategic component of human resource management because it aligns employees' career aspirations with organisational objectives while strengthening organisational commitment and reducing turnover intentions. It encompasses organisational initiatives that assist employees in setting career goals, identifying career pathways, assessing competencies, and accessing developmental opportunities that facilitate long-term career growth (Akkermans et al., 2020; De Vos & Van der Heijden, 2017). From a social exchange perspective, employees who perceive that their organisations invest in their future careers are more likely to reciprocate through stronger commitment and a greater willingness to remain with the organization. Subsequently, career planning has increasingly been recognised as a critical mechanism through which organisations enhance staff retention by fostering career satisfaction, employability, and perceptions of organizational support.

Empirical evidence consistently demonstrates that structured career planning systems contribute to employee retention through several complementary mechanisms. First, career goal setting enhances employees' motivation, career adaptability, and psychological attachment by providing clarity regarding future career aspirations and encouraging proactive career behaviours (Guan et al., 2020; Locke & Latham, 2019). Employees with well-defined career goals are more likely to remain in organisations that provide opportunities to achieve those goals because career optimism and perceived career prospects strengthen organizational commitment and reduce turnover intentions (Karatepe & Olugbade, 2019).

Second, clearly defined career pathways reduce uncertainty about future advancement by enabling employees to understand promotion requirements, career management expectations, and alternative progression opportunities within the organization (Bozionelos et al., 2019). Recent studies further suggest that contemporary career systems increasingly emphasize flexible career pathways, including lateral mobility, cross-functional assignments, and continuous skill development, which are particularly attractive to employees seeking diverse career experiences rather than traditional hierarchical promotion (Baruch, 2015; Lyons et al., 2015).

Although the positive association between career planning and staff retention is well established, the literature also suggests that its effectiveness depends on organisational context. Career planning practices produce stronger retention outcomes when complemented by supportive leadership, mentoring, transparent promotion systems, and organizational cultures that encourage employee development (Newman et al., 2020; Weng & McElroy, 2018). In contrast, organisations with limited advancement opportunities or poorly implemented career systems may fail to realise the retention benefits of career planning despite investing in employee development initiatives.

Despite substantial international evidence, important contextual and methodological gaps remain. Most empirical studies have been conducted in private-sector organizations and developed economies, particularly in Europe and Asia, with comparatively limited attention given to public sector institutions in developing countries (Bozionelos et al., 2019; Weng & McElroy, 2018). This limitation is particularly evident in higher education institutions, where career progression is shaped by institutional promotion policies, academic ranking systems, research productivity requirements, government regulations, and resource constraints. Accordingly, empirical evidence explaining how specific career planning dimensions influence staff retention within public universities in Uganda remains scarce. Addressing this contextual and conceptual gap is therefore important for advancing knowledge on career management and informing evidence-based retention strategies in higher education institutions.

Career Development Practices and Staff Retention

Career development practices constitute a fundamental component of strategic human resource management because they enhance employees' competencies, career satisfaction, organisational commitment, and long-term employability, thereby improving staff retention (De Vos et al., 2020; Shiri et al., 2023). Literature conceptualises career development as an integrated system comprising training and professional development, coaching and mentoring, and career advancement opportunities rather than isolated human resource interventions (Bagdi & Sidana, 2023; Shiri et al., 2023). Across organisational contexts, evidence consistently indicates that employees are more likely to remain with organisations that invest in their professional growth because such investments strengthen perceptions of organisational support, career success, and future career prospects (De Vries et al., 2023; Shiri et al., 2023).

Some empirical studies demonstrate that training and professional development improve retention primarily through indirect mechanisms, including enhanced job satisfaction, employee engagement, organizational commitment, career self-efficacy, and perceived organizational support (Shiri et al., 2023). The focus of career development has shifted from job-specific training to continuous professional development, digital learning, leadership development, and lifelong learning that equip employees to adapt to changing organizational demands (Patino & Naffi, 2023).

Although studies has established a positive association between career development practices and staff retention, the literature indicates that their effectiveness depends on organisational context and implementation quality. Career development initiatives generate stronger retention outcomes when integrated with supportive leadership, equitable promotion systems, and broader talent management strategies rather than implemented as stand-alone interventions (Bagdi & Sidana, 2023; Shiri et al., 2023). Equally, organisations characterised by limited career opportunities, inadequate mentoring, or non-transparent promotion processes often fail to realise the retention benefits of career development despite investing in employee training. These findings suggest that career development contributes to retention through an integrated system of mutually reinforcing practices rather than independent human resource initiatives.

Despite growing empirical support, several methodological and contextual limitations remain. Existing studies are dominated by cross-sectional survey designs and self-reported measures, limiting causal inference and increasing the risk of common method bias (Shiri et al., 2023). Furthermore, much of the evidence originates from healthcare organisations and private-sector institutions in developed economies, raising questions regarding its applicability to public universities in developing countries (De Vries et al., 2023). Another notable limitation is that most studies examine training, mentoring, or career advancement independently, despite increasing recognition that career development functions as a holistic system. Given the unique institutional contexts of public universities, including resource constraints, academic promotion structures, and public-sector regulations, further empirical research is required to examine how integrated career development practices influence staff retention in public higher education institutions in Uganda.

Career Management Policies and Staff Retention

Career management policies have become an essential component of strategic human resource management because they institutionalize formal mechanisms that govern employee development, career mobility, leadership preparation, and succession planning. Unlike discrete career development initiatives, these policies provide consistent organizational frameworks for promotion, professional development, career progression, and mentoring, thereby enhancing employees' perceptions of organizational justice, career security, and long-term organizational support (Barnes et al., 2021; De Vos et al., 2019). Contemporary literature suggests that organizations with well-established career management policies are more successful in retaining talented employees because such policies reduce career uncertainty and strengthen employees' confidence in future career opportunities within the organization (Zacher et al., 2019).

Recent empirical evidence indicates that career management policies influence staff retention primarily by enhancing perceptions of fairness, transparency, and organizational commitment rather than through career advancement opportunities alone. Promotion policies, professional development policies, and career progression frameworks collectively reinforce the psychological contract by providing employees with clear expectations regarding career growth, career management development, and advancement

criteria (De Vos et al., 2019). Across studies, transparent and merit-based promotion systems are consistently associated with stronger organizational commitment and lower turnover intentions because employees perceive that career advancement is based on competence, performance, and objective criteria rather than favoritism or seniority (Barnes et al., 2021).

The literature also highlights an important shift in contemporary career management. Rather than emphasizing hierarchical promotion alone, organizations increasingly adopt career management-based and flexible career systems that integrate leadership development, internal mobility, succession planning, lateral career movement, and individualized career pathways (De Vos et al., 2019; Zacher et al., 2019). Such approaches acknowledge changing workforce expectations, particularly among knowledge workers who increasingly value continuous learning, skill diversification, and diverse career experiences alongside traditional promotion opportunities. Consequently, career progression policies have evolved from linear promotion models toward broader career architectures that encourage long-term employability while simultaneously strengthening employee commitment and organizational retention.

Despite broad consensus regarding the importance of career management policies, evidence suggests that their effectiveness depends largely on implementation quality rather than policy existence. Formal promotion, professional development, and career progression policies produce stronger retention outcomes when employees perceive them as transparent, equitable, and consistently implemented (Barnes et al., 2021). Conversely, delayed promotions, bureaucratic procedures, limited advancement opportunities, inadequate funding for professional development, and inconsistent policy implementation weaken employees' confidence in organizational career systems and increase turnover intentions despite the presence of documented career management policies (De Vos et al., 2019). These findings suggest that employees respond more strongly to the credibility and fairness of career management systems than to their formal design.

Limited empirical evidence exists regarding the combined influence of career management policies on staff retention within public universities in Sub-Saharan Africa, more specifically Uganda where academic promotion systems, institutional governance structures, resource constraints, and government regulations shape career opportunities differently from private-sector organizations. Addressing these contextual and methodological gaps is therefore essential for understanding how integrated career management policies influence staff retention in public higher education institutions in Uganda.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted an explanatory cross-sectional survey design and a quantitative approach with Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to test the proposed relationships. SEM was chosen because it allows for the evaluation of multiple latent constructs at once, accounts for measurement errors, and provides reliable estimates of both direct and indirect effects (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2019).

It focused on academic and administrative staff from three public universities in central Uganda: Makerere, Kyambogo, and Uganda Management Institute. Out of a total population of 2,569, a sample of 346 respondents was selected. Stratified random sampling was used for academic staff, while simple random sampling was used for administrative staff.

Data was collected using a self-administered questionnaire with closed-ended items on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), based on validated scales from previous studies by Kenyi (as cited in Gerald et al., 2026). Of the 331 questionnaires distributed, 260 were

completed and returned, resulting in a response rate of 79%, which is considered sufficient according to Creswell (2023). Career management was assessed by looking at staff knowledge and skills, capabilities, and experience. Staff retention was measured by intention to stay, organisational commitment, job loyalty, and retention rate (Armstrong & Taylor., 2023). To make sure the measurement items were clear, valid, and reliable, a pilot study was carried out. This study produced a Cronbach's alpha coefficient above 0.7 for all constructs, showing acceptable internal consistency.

The data was analysed quantitatively to explore relationships and effects, using SPSS (version 28) for preliminary tests and JASP (version 0.19.1) for Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) and Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) before running SEM analysis. Several preliminary tests, including the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity, were done to check if the dataset was suitable, as shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin and Bartlett'sTest of Sphericity

Test	Value
KMO (Overall)	0.875
Batlett's test of sphericity (X^2)	9147.6
df	67.000
P-value	< 0.001

Source: *Primary data (2026)*

The dataset was tested for sampling adequacy using the KMO criterion, and the overall value was 0.875, which is above the threshold of 0.7, implying sufficient sampling adequacy. A Battlet'stest of sphericity was in addition conducted, and the test was significant ($p < 0.001$), confirming appropriateness of factor analysis Kaiser (as cited in Nkansah (2018). The researcher ensured ethical considerations throughout the study by seeking informed consent from participants, treating all responses with anonymity and confidentiality, ensuring that data were solely for research purposes, and obtaining approval from the research ethics committee before data collection.

FINDINGS

Exploratory Factor Analysis

Upon confirming the suitability of the data set, Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was conducted to establish the factor structure of the constructs, and only factors with eigenvalues above 1 were considered for the subsequent confirmatory factor analysis(CFA). Only items with factor loadings of 0.5 and above whose uniqueness values were less than 0.7 were retained to improve construct validity (Hair., 2019).

Table 2: **Factor Loadings for Career Planning**			
	Factor 1	Factor 2	Uniqueness
CP2	0.755		0.463
CP4	0.732		0.514

CP5	0.634		0.520
CP8	0.575		0.562
CP9	0.568	0.448	0.533
CP1	0.447		0.387
CP3	0.412	0.436	0.503
CP6	0.427	0.506	0.762
CP7		0.707	0.387

Note. Applied rotation method is varimax.

Table 2 above presents the EFA results for the career planning construct. Two underlying factors emerged. Factor 1 was defined by CP2 (0.755), CP4 (0.732), CP5 (0.634), CP8 (0.575), and CP9 (0.568), while Factor 2 was defined by CP7 (0.707) and CP6 (0.506). Items CP3 (0.412/0.436) and CP9 (0.568/0.448) exhibited cross-loadings and was dropped, although CP9 loaded more strongly on Factor 1. CP6 showed relatively high uniqueness (0.762), indicating that a substantial proportion of its variance was not explained by the extracted factors. The results suggest that career planning is represented by a one-factor structure, with most items demonstrating acceptable factor loadings (≥ 0.50), while cross-loading and high-uniqueness items warrant further evaluation during confirmatory factor analysis (CFA).

Table 3: **Factor Loadings for Career Development Practices**

	Factor 1	Factor 2	Uniqueness
CDP3	0.755		0.402
CDP9	0.732		0.441
CDP7	0.634		0.494
CDP5	0.575		0.511
CDP10	0.568	0.448	0.474
CDP2	0.547		0.627
CDP1	0.411	0.436	0.548
CDP4	0.427	0.406	0.561
CDP6		0.707	0.433
CDP8		0.691	

Note. Applied rotation method is varimax.

Results from the table above presents the EFA results for the career development practices construct, revealing a two-factor structure. Factor 1 was defined by CDP3 (0.755), CDP9 (0.732), CDP7 (0.634), CDP5 (0.575), CDP10 (0.568), and CDP2 (0.547). Factor 2 was characterised by CDP6 (0.707) and CDP8 (0.691). Items CDP1 (0.411/0.436), CDP4 (0.427/0.406), and CDP10 (0.568/0.448) exhibited cross-loadings and they were dropped, although CDP10 loaded more strongly on Factor 1. Uniqueness values were within acceptable limits, although CDP2 showed relatively higher uniqueness (0.627), indicating that part of its variance was not explained by the extracted factors but was retained. The findings support a one-factor structure for career development practices, with most items demonstrating satisfactory factor loadings (≥ 0.50), while cross-loading items were dropped (Hair et al., 2022), while the items which loaded well were considered for further confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) for SEM Model.

***Table 4*: Factor Loadings for Career Management Policies**

	Factor 1	Factor 2	Uniqueness
CMP7	0.755		0.401
CMP9	0.732		0.441
CMP4	0.634		0.495
CMP3	0.575		0.511
CMP11	0.568		0.474
CMP2		0.546	0.627
CMP6		0.535	0.547
CMP1		0.506	0.561
CMP5		0.407	0.433
CMP8		0.491	0.486
CMP10		0.474	0.591
CAM10		0.487	0.744

Note. Applied rotation method is varimax.

Table 4 above presents the exploratory factor analysis results for the career management policies construct, which revealed a two-factor structure following Varimax rotation. Factor 1 was defined by CMP7 (0.755), CMP9 (0.732), CMP4 (0.634), CMP3 (0.575), and CMP11 (0.568). Factor 2 comprised CMP2 (0.546), CMP6 (0.535), CMP1 (0.506), CMP8 (0.491), CMP10 (0.474), and CMP5 (0.407). Most items demonstrated acceptable loadings, although CMP5, CMP8, and CMP10 loaded slightly below the recommended threshold of 0.50. Uniqueness values were generally within acceptable limits. Generally, the results support a two-factor structure for career management policies, with the majority of items loading well on their respective factors implying that career management policies were multidimensional. The few lower-loading items were dropped since they didn't score up to the recommended threshold of 0.5 before conducting further confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to establish the final measurement model.

Table 5: **Factor Loadings for Staff Retention**			
	Factor 1	Factor 2	Uniqueness
SR7	0.755		0.402
SR9	0.732		0.441
SR10	0.634		0.490
SR6	0.575		0.511
SR1	0.568	0.448	0.474
SR4	0.447		0.627
SR5	0.511	0.436	0.548
SR3	0.427	0.405	0.561
SR8		0.404	0.433
SR2		0.691	0.486
		0.487	0.744

Note. Applied rotation method is varimax.

Presents the exploratory factor analysis results for the staff retention construct, revealing a two-factor structure following Varimax rotation. Factor 1 was defined by SR7 (0.755), SR9 (0.732), SR10 (0.634), SR6 (0.575), and SR1 (0.568). Factor 2 was represented by SR2 (0.691), while SR8 (0.404) showed a relatively weak loading. Items SR1 (0.568/0.448), SR5 (0.511/0.436), and SR3 (0.427/0.405) exhibited cross-loadings and they were dropped, although SR1 and SR5 loaded more strongly on Factor 1. Uniqueness values were acceptable; however, one item showed relatively high uniqueness (0.627), suggesting that much of its variance was not explained by the extracted factors. The results indicate a two-factor structure for staff retention, with most items demonstrating satisfactory factor loadings. Items with cross-loadings, lower factor loadings, or high uniqueness were dropped before confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was established for the final measurement model.

Model Fit Assessment

Table 6: ***Fit indices***

Index	**Value**
Comparative Fit Index (CFI)	0.956
Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI)	0.951
Parsimony Normed Fit Index (PNFI)	0.892
Root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA)	0.048
Standardized root mean square residual (SRMR)	0.062

Model Fit Assessment

Table 6: ***Fit indices***

Index	**Value**

Note. *Apart from the PNFI, the fit indices are scaled up a bit Because of the categorical variables in the data*

Based on the acceptable threshold, CFI>0.90, RMSEA<0.08, SRMR<0.08, GFI ≥ 0.90, PNFI ≥ 0.6, and the proposed model exhibited a good fit to the data and was suitable for hypothesis testing since all the fit indices above were within the accepted threshold (Hu & Bentler, 1999; Browne & Cudeck, 1993).

Structural Model

To examine the structural model, Onyx was employed by testing the hypothesised effects of career planning, career development practices, and career management policies on staff retention. Path coefficients (β-values), t-values, and p-values were examined to determine the strength and magnitude of each relationship. Fit indices, which included comparative fit index (CFI), Root Mean Square Error of Approximation, and standard Root Mean Square Error (SRMR), were employed to evaluate the model fit and they all met the required standards (Hair et al., 2022).

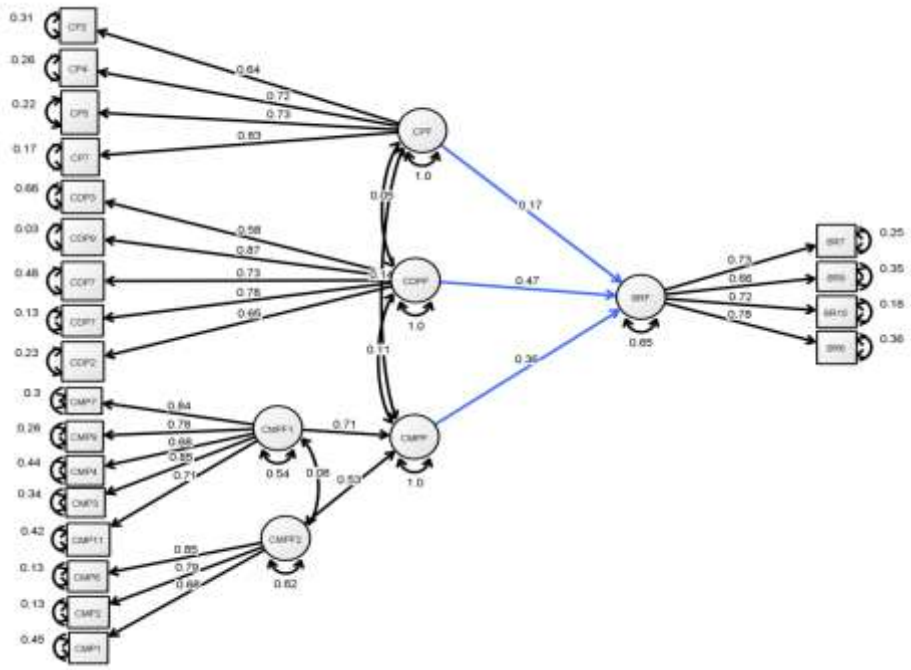


Figure 1: Structural Equation Model

Figure 1 above illustrates the final SEM model. The measurement model demonstrated satisfactory indicator loadings (0.58-0.87), confirming that the observed variables adequately represented their respective latent constructs. Structurally, career planning **(**β = 0.17**),** career development practices **(**β = 0.47**),** and career management policies **(**β = 0.36**)** all had positive direct effects on staff retention, with career development practices exerting the strongest influence. Together, the three constructs explained

65% of the variation in staff retention **(**R^2 = 0.65)**,** indicating that career management is an important predictor of employee retention.

Table 7: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.652[a]	.650	.647	.64435

a. Predictors: (Constant), CP, CDP & CMP

Findings in Table 7 revealed that the model explains R^2 = 0.650 (65%) of the variance in staff retention (SR), revealing a high explanatory power. The adjusted R^2 of 0.647 (64.7%) implies that the model is stable with minimal over fitting as per Hair et al., (2019). The results further imply that career management predicts staff retention in public universities by 64.7% with its constructs of career planning, career development practices, and career management policies, while the remaining percentage is accounted for by other factors not considered in this study.

Table 8: Coefficients of Career Management and Staff Retention

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	2.045	.405		5.064	.000
	Career Planning	.332	.092	.172	3.576	.001
	Career Management Policies	.351	.083	.360	4.175	.000
	Career Development Practices	.604	.091	.472	7.917	.000
a. Dependent Variable: Staff Retention						

Source: Primary data (2025)

Findings from SEM model revealed that all the three predictors of staff retention; career planning (CP), career development practices (CDP), and career management policies (CMP) have a positive and significant effect on staff retention (SR), with CDP having the strongest predictor (β = 0.472, t-value = 7.917, p-value < 0.000), followed by CMP (β = 0.360, t = 4.175, p < 0.000), and the least was CP (β = 0.172, t = 3.576, p = 0.001). This implies that any improvement in the studied constructs positively and significantly influences staff retention of academic and administrative staff of public universities in the central region of Uganda. The model exhibits moderate explanatory power and aligns with the recommendations of Hair et al. (2019).

Table 9: Summary of Hypotheses and SEM Structural Path Results

Hypothesis	Path	Beta(β)	t-value	P-value	Decision
H_1	CPF → SRF	0.172	3.576	.001	Supported
H_2	CDPF → SRF	0.472	7.917	.000	Supported

H_3	CMPF → SRF	0.360	4.175	.000	Supported

Regression Equation: $SRF=\beta_0 +0.172CPF+0.472CDPF+0.360CMPF+\varepsilon$

Results from the table reveal that all the hypotheses have a positive and significant relationship with staff retention. CP ($\beta = 0.172$, t-value = 3.576, p-value < 0.001), CDP ($\beta = 0.472$, $t = 7.917$, $p < 0.000$), and CMP ($\beta = 0.360$, $t = 4.175$, $p = 0.000$) implying that all the hypotheses were accepted with their t-values above the threshold of 1.96 meaning that the findings are significant at 5% confidence level (McClave, Sincich, & Benson, 2018; Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2019; Field, 2018). Career development practices being the strongest predictor of staff retention in public universities in the central region of Uganda.

DISCUSSION

The study examined the effect of career planning, career development practices, and career management policies on staff retention in public universities in Uganda. The SEM results showed that all the three dimensions of career management positively influenced staff retention, hence supporting the study hypotheses. However, the magnitude of the effects differed, suggesting that some career management dimensions contribute more strongly to retention than others.

H_1: Proposed that career planning positively influences staff retention. The results supported this hypothesis, with career planning showing a positive but relatively weaker effect ($\beta = 0.17$). This finding indicates that helping employees establish career goals, identify career paths, and assess their competencies encourages them to remain in the institution. It aligns with studies showing that career planning enhances retention by improving career clarity and career satisfaction (Akkermans et al., 2020; Guan et al., 2020; Kong et al., 2019). In the same line, Karatepe and Olugbade (2019) found that employees with clear career goals exhibit stronger organisational commitment because they perceive organisational support for their long-term aspirations. The findings also support Human Capital Theory (Becker & Schultz, 1960), which argues that organisations create valuable human capital by investing in employees' knowledge, competencies, and career growth. In public universities, where academic careers require sustained investment in teaching, research, and professional development, career planning strengthens confidence in future career progression, thereby promoting staff retention.

H_2 examined the effect of career development practices on staff retention. The findings revealed that career development practices had the strongest significant positive effect ($\beta = 0.47$), indicating that training and professional development, coaching and mentoring, and career advancement opportunities play the greatest role in retaining academic and administrative staff. This finding is consistent with contemporary human resource literature, which identifies continuous employee development as a key predictor of organisational commitment and retention (De Vries et al., 2023; Patino & Naffi, 2023; Shiri et al., 2023). Staff who gains new knowledge and skills, participate in mentoring, and access career advancement opportunities are more likely to perceive that their organisations value their contributions and future careers. The findings also support Human Capital Theory, which views employee development as a strategic investment that enhances organisational productivity while encouraging employees to remain with their employers (Becker & Schultz, 1960; Sweetland, 1996). For public universities, investments in staff training, postgraduate education, research capacity, and leadership development strengthen employees' commitment by increasing opportunities for professional growth.

These findings therefore identify career development practices as the most influential career management strategy for retaining highly qualified staff.

Lastly, H_3 proposed that career management policies positively influence staff retention. The findings supported this hypothesis, with career management policies exerting a moderate positive effect ($\beta = 0.36$). This suggests that policies governing promotion, professional development, and career progression encourage staff to remain by promoting fairness, transparency, and confidence in institutional career systems. The findings agree with Barnes et al. (2021) and De Vos et al. (2019), who reported that transparent promotion and career progression policies strengthen organisational commitment because employees perceive advancement decisions as fair and merit-based. Likewise, Zacher et al. (2019) argue that clear career management policies reduce career uncertainty by increasing confidence in future career opportunities. However, the findings also suggest that policies alone may not guarantee staff retention unless they are consistently implemented and supported by effective career development opportunities.

Finally, the findings demonstrate that career management is a multidimensional construct that significantly influence staff retention in public universities in the central region of Uganda. Career development practices being the strongest predictor of staff retention, followed by career management policies, while career planning had weakest predictive values but had a significant effect. These results suggest that, although helping employees plan their careers is important, retention is more strongly improved when public universities invest in staff development and reinforce these efforts with transparent, consistently implemented career management policies.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study concludes that career management is a significant predictor of staff retention in public universities in central Uganda. All the three dimensions examined; career planning, career development practices, and career management policies positively influenced staff retention, confirming the study hypotheses. Among them, career development practices had the strongest effect, followed by career management policies, while career planning, although significant, had the weakest influence. These findings suggest that providing employees with structured career planning, continuous learning opportunities, mentoring, coaching, and transparent career progression systems strengthens organisational commitment and encourages employees to remain in their institutions. The findings further support Human Capital Theory by demonstrating that investments in employees' career growth enhance both individual development and institutional sustainability.

The study recommends that public universities should institutionalise structured career planning by supporting staff to identify career goals and progression pathways. Universities should prioritise career development through regular training, postgraduate study support, mentoring, coaching, leadership development, and clear career advancement opportunities, as these have the greatest influence on staff retention. In addition, public university management should strengthen and consistently implement transparent career management policies governing promotions, professional development, and career progression to enhance fairness, reduce career uncertainty, and reinforce employee confidence in long-term career prospects within the institution. These interventions are likely to improve staff retention and sustain institutional performance.

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