

# Employee Retention Strategies Used by Private Childcare Owners

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## Abstract

Ineffective retention strategies can lead to employee turnover. Private childcare business owners who struggle to improve employee retention may find their business confronting attrition as a result. Grounded in job embeddedness theory, the purpose of this qualitative pragmatic inquiry research project was to identify and explore effective retention strategies used by private childcare business owners to reduce high employee turnover rates. The participants were eight private childcare business owners who had implemented retention strategies. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, public websites, and public documents. Through thematic analysis, five themes were identified: (a) providing competitive rewards and family support; (b) recognizing, developing, and empowering staff; (c) leading visibly to nurture strong relationships and culture; (d) designing operations that stabilize work and sustain quality; and (e) anchoring work in purpose, community, and adaptive growth. A key recommendation is for private childcare business owners to entrench themselves in the community, understand the positive social impact their employees wish to achieve, and use the business owner's network to socially connect their employees. The implications for positive social change include the potential for private childcare business owners to implement the identified strategies and expand positive social change opportunities for individuals in their employ, thereby benefiting the communities they serve economically and through service to the community.

## Keywords

Job Satisfaction, Service Delivery, Childcare, Childcare Facilities, School Leadership, Recruitment, Training, Teacher Shortage, Early Childhood Development, Burnout, Job Embeddedness, Employee Retention, Mitigation, Quality Care, Organizational Commitment, Intrinsic Motivation, Extrinsic Motivation, Training, Autonomy, Recognition, Productivity, Private

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Childcare, Public Childcare, Remuneration, Benefits, Fatigue, Depression, Anxiety, Funding, Proactive Behavior, Motivation Factor, Hygiene Factor, Consistency, Attachment Bonds, Private Facilities, Public Facilities, Coping Strategies, Exhaustion

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## 1. Introduction

Inadequate childcare has emerged as a significant business issue in the 21st century. Inadequate childcare arrangements and provisions cost parents \$37 billion dollars a year in lost income and employers \$13 billion dollars in lost productivity. As such, there is a significant need to enhance the availability and quality of childcare for American families. Compared to other educational occupations, childcare is emotionally and physically taxing on employees (Bezie et al., 2025). As a consequence, childcare providers, especially early childhood childcare providers, experience relatively high levels of stress and fatigue, factors that lead to burnout and potentially to turnover (Bryant et al., 2023). Poor job satisfaction is also a significant concern in childcare, and poor job satisfaction presents another pathway leading to burnout and, eventually, to turnover. In addition to these ongoing, long-term challenges to childcare provision, the COVID-19 pandemic caused a significant surge in turnover in the childcare industry due to the danger, stress, and anxiety associated with pandemic conditions.

Turnover and retention, in general, are essential to manage. On the one hand, retaining employees over time allows for the accumulation of skills, experience, and institutional knowledge (Bai et al., 2022). On the other hand, turnover also has more direct costs, as identifying, recruiting, and training new employees is costly. As a result, research suggested that preventing turnover and bolstering attrition would be a significant way that leaders in the childcare industry could boost their businesses' performance (Bezie et al., 2025). In a broad sense, this may entail understanding and meeting the needs of employees (Huning et al., 2020). More specifically, however, it was not evident what employee retention strategies could most effectively redress the high rates of turnover in the childcare sector.

## 2. Literature Review

A comprehensive review of the scholarly academic literature was conducted to understand the current literature on high attrition rates in the private childcare industry, the theories and potential themes associated with the phenomenon, and different scholarly points of view. The literature review was conducted by searching numerous online databases including PubMed, Business Source Complete, Emerald Management Journalism EMBASE, Boolean Operators, Elsevier, ScienceDirect, Google Scholar, Sage, and ProQuest. Key word terms were job satisfaction, service delivery, childcare, childcare facilities, school leadership, recruitment, training, teacher shortage, early childhood development, burnout, job em-

beddedness, employee retention, mitigation, quality care, organizational commitment, intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, training, autonomy, recognition, productivity, private childcare, public childcare, remuneration, benefits, fatigue, depression, anxiety, funding, proactive behavior, motivation factor, hygiene factor, consistency, attachment bonds, private facilities, public facilities, coping strategies, and exhaustion. The key terms were used individually and in combination to generate relevant results. Literature from peer-reviewed sources dated within 5 years was regarded as current content. The purpose of this qualitative pragmatic inquiry research project was to identify and explore effective employee retention strategies private childcare owners use to reduce high employee turnover rates.

### 2.1. Conceptual Framework

The theoretical foundation of this research project was Lee et al.'s (2004) job embeddedness theory, which emphasizes job satisfaction needs and factors influencing employee retention. Understanding this theory would provide a deeper understanding of the factors influencing employee turnover. Bryant et al. (2023) explained that management and leadership teams of private facilities, such as private childcare facilities, must take the necessary steps to ensure that they have a clear, functional, and transparent understanding of the aspects that can impact job satisfaction and employee retention.

The job embeddedness theory, developed by (Lee et al., 2004), provides insight into the factors within their centers that can impact the levels of job satisfaction and, thus, retention rates of employees within the business. This theory places emphasis on the aspects that can influence the levels of commitment that employees have towards the business that employs them, thus impacting their satisfaction and turnover intent. (Lee et al., 2004) asserted that the job satisfaction and dissatisfaction experienced by employees were not the primary influencers that affected whether employees decided to leave or stay with a business.

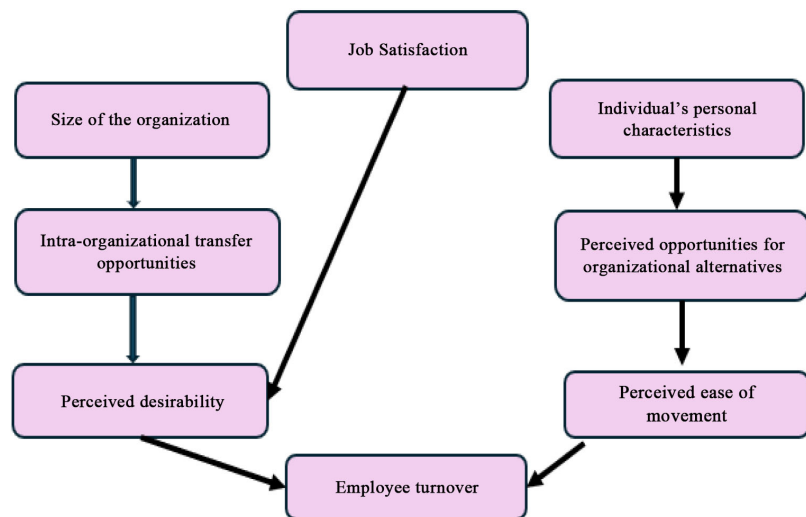
The job embeddedness theory posits that job embeddedness can promote feelings and perceptions among employees focusing on inclusion, which can impact the levels of engagement and performance of the employees (Dogantekin et al., 2022). Several factors, such as the effects of COVID-19, technological advancements, the involvement of unions, and labor relations, could influence business strategies, such as downsizing in an attempt to remain competitive within challenging circumstances.

The probability of voluntary employee turnover increases as a result of job insecurity, highlighting the need for business managers and leaders to develop and implement strategies to provide employees with the necessary support, motivating these individuals to remain with the business (Dogantekin et al., 2022; Peltokorpi & Allen, 2023). Job insecurity, a consequence of potential threats within an organization, can lead to negative outcomes and the well-being of the employees as well as the business, as these employees are more likely to voluntarily leave the business

(Bryant et al., 2023; Huning et al., 2020). Resources can be intrinsic and personal in nature, which can include knowledge, experience, and the ability to effectively utilize the different tools needed to perform their duties (Peltokorpi & Allen, 2023).

Resources that employees deem important and valuable are often acquired, allocated, and protected, as these resources can be applied to address challenges, whether within or outside of the business. The job embeddedness theory provides a deeper insight into the aspects that influence whether employees decide to remain or leave a business. Lee et al. (2004) and Huning et al. (2020) explained that there are multifaceted and interrelated dimensions that can impact voluntary employee turnover. These dimensions include links, which refer to the different relationships and interactions that occur both inside as well as outside of the business; fit, which refers to the levels of contentment and comfort an employee experiences within a business; and sacrifice, which focuses on the implications of losing tangible and intangible benefits when leaving the business.

Job embeddedness, does not focus on preventing employee turnover but on the development and implementation of strategies to improve employee retention. Job embeddedness, although influenced by them, extends further than traditional job satisfaction theories, such as Herzberg's motivation-hygiene theory, as seen in Figure 1. Herzberg's (1968) theory indicated that there are intrinsic and extrinsic factors that influence job satisfaction and that these play a significant role in the development of strategies to promote job embeddedness.



Note. From "The story of why we stay: A review of Job Embeddedness," by Lee et al. (2014). Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior, 1, 1999-216. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-orgpsych-031413-091244>.

**Figure 1.** Job embeddedness theory.

## 2.2. Application and Implications of Job-Embeddedness

Negative behavior, including absenteeism, is less likely to occur among employees

who are embedded within a company (Lee et al., 2004). An increased focus on employee engagement strategies by the management and leadership teams of companies, including training and career growth opportunities, can play a significant role in increasing job embeddedness among employees (Shah et al., 2021). Li et al. (2022) asserted that contemporary human resource practices often place emphasis on the creation and maintenance of suitable domains and areas within a business, which can assist employees with the opportunities to obtain both personal as well as company goals. Shah et al. (2021) explained that enhanced focus on opportunities and strategies within the business that can improve the embeddedness of employees can serve as guidelines for the company's management and leadership teams when developing and implementing strategies to address voluntary staff turnover.

Employee turnover and retention are dynamic and contextual constructs influenced by several intrinsic and extrinsic motivators. Traditional job satisfaction theories, such as Herzberg's (1968) motivation-hygiene theory, highlight the relevance of understanding the basic factors influencing the job satisfaction of employees, but it was also indicated by (Lee et al., 2004) and Li et al. (2022) that employee engagement is a valuable contributor to employee retention. The development and implementation of strategies to promote employee retention should be targeted to the specific needs of the business, as the individual needs of the employees and the business itself should be taken into consideration.

Employee embeddedness can have a significant impact on several activities within the company, including performance, commitment, and intention to leave the company (Ali et al., 2022). Adil et al. (2020) concluded that companies often experience serious challenges due to a lack of qualified and experienced staff, while Huning et al. (2020) explained that the necessary steps should be taken to determine the needs of employees to ensure that they receive the necessary support to reduce turnover. The type and intensity of embeddedness experienced by employees can change, which should motivate management and leadership teams to continuously develop retention strategies that are contemporary, dynamic, and focused on the needs of the employees. The application of strategies that will address the needs of the company's employees and strategies to improve embeddedness largely depends on the individual needs associated with the business, indicating that a blanket approach cannot be followed (Ali et al., 2022; Lee et al., 2004).

A business's ability to retain qualified and experienced personnel is often perceived as a challenge by management and leadership teams. A high staff turnover rate has several negative implications for the company's well-being, as well as numerous financial impacts. Adil et al. (2020) noted that workers who feel supported in the workplace and whose overall work environment fulfills their extrinsic and intrinsic needs will experience increased levels of job satisfaction, coupled with low intentions to leave the company. The cost associated with recruiting, hiring,

and training new staff members affects the company's ability to reach its goals, influencing its well-being. ECD staff members play a vital role in the education industry, as they are involved in developing the foundation of aspects that are relevant to the continuous growth and development of children.

There are several factors that can impact the turnover intention of staff at ECD facilities, including occupational and the centers' influences. [Adil et al. \(2020\)](#) explained that the roles of qualified teachers are essential for the growth and development of children. [Herzberg \(1968\)](#) and [\(Lee et al., 2004\)](#) explained that management and leadership teams of organizations such as private childcare facilities need to prioritize the factors that can impact the job satisfaction of these individuals, such as remuneration, growth and development opportunities, and autonomy. [Bezie et al. \(2025\)](#) explained that teachers at childcare facilities often experience mental and physical fatigue due to the complex and diverse nature of their duties. It is imperative that support strategies are developed to address the specific needs of private childcare teachers to limit the occurrence of fatigue, burnout, and turnover ([Bryant et al., 2023](#)).

Factors that can influence the turnover intention of staff at ECD facilities include remuneration and benefits, organizational climate, job demands and workload, the availability of resources, and professional growth and development opportunities ([Adil et al., 2020](#)). The management and leadership structures need to have a comprehensive understanding of the factors that impact the job satisfaction and employee turnover rate among staff at private childcare facilities to ensure that strategies to limit staff turnover are relevant. [Ali et al. \(2022\)](#) explained that organizational management and leadership teams need to prioritize strategies to improve the levels of job satisfaction and job embeddedness within the organization. Employees who are socially involved or embedded in their organizations are often not interested in leaving the organization, which influences the turnover rate ([Ali et al., 2022](#); [Adil et al., 2020](#); [Lee et al., 2004](#)).

The phenomenon of high turnover rates among staff members at childcare facilities has several implications for the quality and consistency of services provided within these facilities. Findings by [Bezie et al. \(2025\)](#) concluded that the daily responsibilities of childcare staff are stressful as a result of the mental and physical demands associated with the roles. High attrition rates among staff result in additional expenses for the organization in its entirety, which can lead to significant financial implications. High attrition rates can lead to higher costs, which include recruiting, training, and onboarding new staff members ([Adil et al., 2020](#)). In addition, high attrition rates among staff at childcare facilities can impact motivation and productivity, impacting the overall outcomes and well-being of the organization as a whole ([Adil et al., 2020](#)).

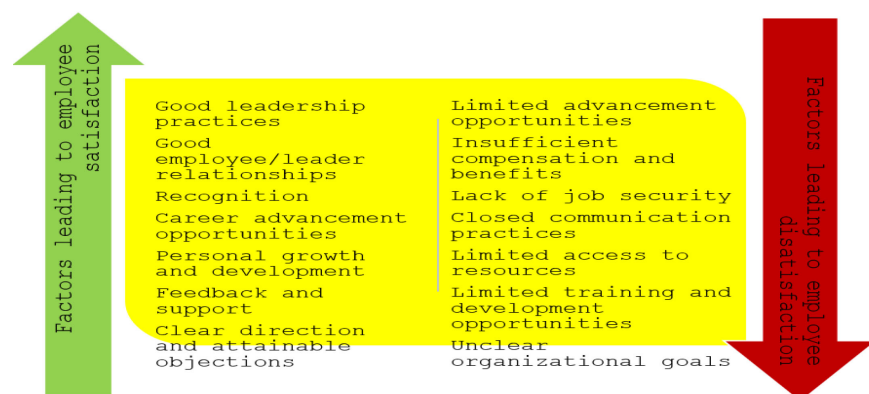
Staff turnover at organizations such as private childcare facilities can be the result of several factors. [Adil et al. \(2020\)](#) explained that employee knowledge, which is a vital aspect of the continued well-being of an organization, is lost when em-

employees leave the organization. Decreased levels of job satisfaction, often coupled with discouragement, impact the productivity of the organization, leading to increased staff attrition rates (Ali et al., 2022; Bezie et al., 2025). Organization-related experience and knowledge are integral components of organizations such as childcare facilities, and the continuity of service delivery is severely compromised by voluntary staff turnover (Bai et al., 2022).

The roles of staff at childcare facilities are vital for the continued success and well-being of the organization, and high attrition rates can impact the organization's output. Li et al. (2022) indicated that a variety of factors can influence individuals' intention to leave an organization, which can include the relationships with students, parents, and colleagues, the availability of resources, and the physical demands that can be associated with performing their duties. An understanding of the factors that can lead to job satisfaction or dissatisfaction of staff at private childcare facilities in Texas should be determined to ensure that a deeper understanding of voluntary employee turnover can be developed. The voluntary turnover of staff at private childcare facilities must be investigated and addressed to increase the quality and consistency of service delivery, as well as the organization's sustainability and well-being. Different management and leadership strategies can have a positive effect on employee turnover; the application of these strategies can promote the overall well-being of the organization.

### 2.3. Impact to Childcare Facilities

Significant expenditures are associated with replacing employees who left the organization. Several factors, such as the costs associated with advertising, hiring, training, and onboarding new employees, must be taken into consideration when replacing employees. The factors impacting the job satisfaction of staff at childcare facilities must be investigated by the organization's management and leadership structures to ensure that employee turnover does not impact the organization's overall outcomes.



Note. From "One More Time: How do you motivate employees," by Herzberg (1968). Harvard Business Review, 46.

<https://hbr.org/2003/01/one-more-time-how-do-you-motivate-employees>

**Figure 2.** Job satisfaction model.



Job satisfaction can be defined as a positive emotional state that an organization's employees experience in the workplace (Herzberg, 1968). It was further explained that employees who perceived themselves as valuable to the team and whose contributions were valued tended to be productive and diligent in performing their duties, as can be seen in **Figure 2**. Herzberg (1968) also explained that the attrition rates of employees within organizations can be directly linked with attrition rates. It is invaluable for childcare facilities to ensure that the environments within which the staff members function are supportive and sensitive to their needs to limit and prevent attrition among these individuals.

#### **2.4. Job-Related Factors**

Childcare facilities are often faced with demanding circumstances. The management and leadership teams of private childcare facilities need to identify the factors influencing job satisfaction, as these strategies will address the voluntary turnover of staff in these facilities. The factors within an organization that lead to employees leaving the organization must be identified, as the management and leadership teams of organizations, such as childcare facilities, can develop targeted strategies to prevent and reduce attrition (Schick, 2020). The reduction and elimination of employee turnover must be addressed, as employee turnover can result in inconsistent performance, reduced service quality, as well as increased operational costs due to the processes associated with hiring and training new employees.

#### **2.5. Availability of Resources**

The availability and quality of resources within private childcare facilities can have significant influences on the job satisfaction of employees at these facilities, ultimately impacting the turnover rate. The availability of resources is an extrinsic factor that can influence staff motivation and dedication to the organization (Herzberg, 1968). The availability of the necessary resources, which include human, financial, equipment, and facilities, assist employees in performing their duties, which can have a positive influence on job satisfaction. Limited or insufficient resources lead to dissatisfaction, impacting the staff turnover rate.

#### **2.6. Professional Growth and Development Opportunities**

The availability of professional growth and development initiatives within an organization can promote employees' opportunities for promotion. Organizations that invest in initiatives to facilitate personal growth and development opportunities, whether formal or informal, or on-the-job training, will enhance the feelings of motivation among these employees, which is intrinsic and improves job satisfaction (Herzberg, 1968). Employees presented with opportunities to improve their chances for promotion and leadership roles within the organization are also more likely to remain with the organization, impacting turnover rates.



## 2.7. Mental and Physical Health

Mental and physical well-being extensively impact job satisfaction and turnover intent within the organization. [Shah et al. \(2021\)](#) explained that the continuous exposure to challenging situations within the workplace, such as long work hours, emotionally draining circumstances, and insufficient resources, and the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic can negatively impact the physical and emotional well-being of employees. Increased levels of stress can be harmful to the mental and physical well-being of employees, which can lead to depression, anxiety, inadequate service delivery, decreased productivity, and burnout ([Treuren & Fein, 2021](#)). The psychological climate within an organization, such as a private childcare facility, can also have far-reaching consequences on employee well-being and turnover ([Adil et al., 2020](#); [Ali et al., 2022](#)).

Staff at childcare facilities are often faced with complex situations, which can lead to burnout and increased staff turnover within the organization. [Aboagye et al. \(2023\)](#) asserted that job demands, which include workload, emotional and physical demands, and role conflict, can significantly impact psychological burnout and emotional exhaustion. [Bezie et al. \(2025\)](#) asserted that teachers at private childcare facilities can easily suffer from burnout, which can lead to emotional exhaustion.

Emotional exhaustion and burnout among staff at private childcare facilities can lead to demotivation, negatively impacting the teacher's ability to interact and engage with the students. It was also explained that motivation factors, such as autonomy, in the workplace can positively impact the overall impact of stressors ([Ali et al., 2022](#)). Staff at private childcare facilities are often confronted with high workloads, limited support, and insufficient incentives, which can have negative effects on their mental and physical health.

## 2.8. Job Satisfaction, Embeddedness, and Quality of Service

Job embeddedness refers to the level of connection employees have with the organization they work for and focuses on the factors that will influence whether they remain with or leave the organization ([Lee et al., 2004](#)). Both job satisfaction and dissatisfaction impact the level of embeddedness an employee experiences, which has definite consequences on the retention of staff within the organization. Findings by [Ali et al. \(2022\)](#) explained that the psychological capital, or an individual's positive psychological state, can include aspects such as self-efficacy and resilience.

Organizations that promote the psychological capital of employees increase their embeddedness in the organization, which will increase employee satisfaction and retention ([Adil et al., 2020](#); [Ali et al., 2022](#)). Several factors, both intrinsic and extrinsic, influence employee turnover ([Herzberg, 1968](#); [Lee et al., 2004](#)). These factors include the quality of the work environment, the nature of their workload and job demands, the availability of resources, autonomy, recognition, and op-

portunities for personal and professional growth.

Job embeddedness focuses on three primary dimensions, namely fit, links, and sacrifice, which provide guidelines for the degree of engagement and integration experienced by employees, both in the organization as well as the external environment. Employees who experience high levels of job satisfaction tend to have high levels of embeddedness towards the organization, which reduces the intent to leave the organization (Lee et al., 2004).

Staff members experiencing high levels of job satisfaction and embeddedness within private childcare facilities tend to focus on providing consistent and quality service delivery (Caven et al., 2021). High-quality service delivery in private childcare facilities is dependent on employees who experience high levels of job satisfaction and embeddedness, as these aspects limit staff turnover.

## **2.9. Summary of Literature Review**

Private childcare facility leaders' effectiveness may increase if they know the factors that can influence the job satisfaction and embeddedness of employees within the organization. An understanding of the value, applicability, and challenges associated with motivation and hygiene factors impacting job satisfaction will promote the development of approaches and strategies to address turnover. Factors that are relevant and applicable to the roles and responsibilities of individual employees must be determined in order to develop specific, targeted strategies to address contextual needs.

This chapter provided an overview of the existing literature in an attempt to gain a deeper understanding of the factors influencing job satisfaction, embeddedness, and staff turnover at private childcare facilities in Texas. General challenges, intrinsic and extrinsic, that were identified centered around remuneration and benefits, work hours, and physical and mental fatigue. The need for clear role division and adequate support was also mentioned.

Although several sources focused on the factors influencing job satisfaction and employee turnover, limited information was available about the impact of specific leadership strategies and initiatives on the retention of staff at private childcare facilities. The need for further research focusing on the management of private childcare facilities were identified in this chapter. The findings from this research project will attempt to provide new knowledge to improve the development and implementation of strategies to address staff turnover at private childcare facilities.

The next section will focus on providing information about the research methodology and design that are applicable for this research project. The value and relevance of the qualitative research methodology, as well as a pragmatic inquiry research design, will be explored. The research methodology section will be followed by a section discussing the findings obtained by the research conducted.

### 3. Methodology

The researchers used a qualitative pragmatic inquiry research. The target population was private childcare business owners in the southwest region of the US who had effective employee retention strategies to reduce high employee turnover rates. The participants were selected through purposive sampling. The participants were sourced through LinkedIn and other professional and personal networks. Eight participants took part in the study. The primary data collection strategy was semi-structured interviews; the secondary data collection method was available and relevant secondary data that corroborated the participant's responses. Member checking the researchers' interpretations of the participants' responses was employed to ensure reliability and validity of the data. Data saturation was reached at seven interviews; however one additional interview was conducted for confirmation. Participants' names were de-identified, and each participant was assigned a unique pseudonym (P1 - P8) to maintain confidentiality. The interview audio recordings were transcribed using transcription software and named per the pseudonyms assigned to each participant. The thematic analysis process was used to analyze the data. It comprised the researchers becoming familiar with the data, and then progressed to coding the data, theme identification, verification, and naming the themes. The process concluded with the researchers compiling the results and writing the report. The researchers used thematic analysis to analyze the data. The same thematic analysis approach by [Braun and Clarke \(2022\)](#) was applied to the secondary data sources, including publicly available documents and websites. These documents were treated as additional textual data and underwent the same familiarization and coding steps as the interview transcripts. Codes from secondary data were compared with interview codes and used for methodological triangulation to enhance the completeness and credibility of the findings.

### 4. Findings

The purpose of this qualitative pragmatic inquiry research project was to identify and explore employee retention strategies used by private childcare business owners to reduce high employee turnover rates. The research question used to guide this study was: What effective employee retention strategies are used by private childcare business owners to reduce high employee turnover rates? Five themes emerged: (a) providing competitive rewards and family support; (b) recognizing, developing, and empowering staff; (c) leading visibly to nurture strong relationships and culture; (d) designing operations that stabilize work and sustain quality; and (e) anchoring work in purpose, community, and adaptive growth.

**Table 1** displays the themes and the number of times the theme was referenced in the participants' responses.

**Table 2** displays the themes and the number of times theme was referenced in the participants' responses.

**Table 1.** Participant demographics.

| P # | Years<br>Experience | Size of Operation<br>(number of children) | # Employees | Franchise/<br>Independent |
|-----|---------------------|-------------------------------------------|-------------|---------------------------|
|     |                     | S (6 - 8).<br>M (9 - 11).<br>L (12 - 14)  |             |                           |
| P1  | 15                  | L                                         | 20          | Franchise                 |
| P2  | 22                  | L                                         | 26          | Franchise                 |
| P3  | 15                  | L                                         | 22          | Franchise                 |
| P4  | 8                   | M                                         | 16          | Franchise                 |
| P5  | 40                  | L                                         | 50          | Francise                  |
| P6  | 16                  | L                                         | 13          | Independent               |
| P7  | 10                  | M                                         | 9           | Independent               |
| P8  | 33                  | L                                         | 28          | Francise                  |

Note. Participant demographics.

**Table 2.** Theme and number of references.

| Theme                                                                 | Number of<br>References |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Theme 1: Providing competitive rewards and family support             | 21                      |
| Theme 2: Recognizing, developing, and empowering staff                | 24                      |
| Theme 3: Leading visibly to nurture strong relationships and culture  | 17                      |
| Theme 4: Designing operations that stabilize work and sustain quality | 34                      |
| Theme 5: Anchoring work in purpose, community, and adaptive growth    | 24                      |

Note. Number of times each theme was referenced.

Researchers use job embeddedness theory in retention studies because it helps to explain why employees retain by accounting for the web of forces that anchor individuals to their jobs and communities, not just their attitudes (Jiang et al., 2012; Lee et al., 2014; Mitchell et al., 2001). Job embeddedness theory is useful in practice-oriented projects because it translates into observable levers leaders can shape, including relationships, role alignment, and valued benefits, to reduce voluntary turnover in people-intensive settings such as private childcare. Mitchell et al. (2001) defined job embeddedness theory as a set of on-the-job and off-the-job forces, links, fit, and sacrifice that jointly influence the likelihood of staying; subsequent work showed job embeddedness theory predicts voluntary turnover beyond satisfaction and commitment (Holtom et al., 2006; Mitchell et al., 2001). In this formulation, links are the formal and informal connections with coworkers, supervisors, families, and the community; fit is the alignment between a person's

values, skills, and life circumstances and the organization's culture and job demands; and sacrifice is what one would lose, tangibly and psychologically, by leaving.

The five themes align with and extend job embeddedness theory in childcare-specific ways. Providing competitive rewards and family supports strengthens sacrifice by making departure costly (forfeiting raises, personal time off (PTO), and employee childcare discounts) and improves fit by matching compensation and benefits to educators' family realities (Mitchell et al., 2001). Recognizing, developing, and empowering staff deepens links through mentoring, coaching, and recognition rituals while heightening fit via skill growth and clear advancement paths; funded credentials also add sacrifice (Holtom et al., 2006; Mitchell et al., 2001).

Leading visibly to nurture strong relationships and culture intensifies links through everyday access to responsive leaders and enhances fit by establishing norms of voice and psychological safety (Jiang et al., 2012). Designing operations that stabilize work and sustain quality optimizes fit through role-age-group placement, predictable schedules, and ratio supports, while adding links via onboarding mentors and dependable administrative backup and increasing sacrifice by institutionalizing supportive systems that are costly to give up (Lee et al., 2014). Anchoring work in purpose, community, and adaptive growth heightens fit by aligning day-to-day work with the mission of early childhood education and broadens links with colleagues, families, and community partners; visible community recognition further raises sacrifice (Holtom & Darabi, 2018).

## 4.1. Themes

### 4.1.1. Theme 1: Providing Competitive Rewards and Family Support

All the participants (100%) contributed to this theme. The participants described a deliberate compensation strategy that mixes above-market wages with structured raises, affordable health insurance, paid time off, and family-centered benefits such as employee childcare discounts. Compensation and working conditions are key factors associated with turnover intentions (Adil et al., 2020; Herzberg, 1968), and research in early childhood education links targeted improvements in pay/benefits and supportive policies to higher satisfaction and reduced intent to quit (Bryant et al., 2023; Caven et al., 2021).

Participants framed these offers not as isolated perks but as a coherent package that removes economic pressure points and signals that the organization values caregiving work. Several participants talked about scheduled raises and longevity bonuses to tenure milestones to make progress visible and retention tangible. Other participants emphasized subsidized health benefits and paid time off (PTO) as essentials that help staff absorb everyday shocks without sacrificing income. The participants also mentioned family-oriented supports, especially reduced tuition for employees' children. **Table 3** displays theme 1 and the key patterns identified during the analysis.

**Table 3.** Theme 1 and key patterns.

| Theme                                            | Key pattern                                                                               |
|--------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Providing competitive rewards and family support | Wages<br>Raises<br>Health benefits<br>Earned-day-off incentive (EDO)<br>Tuition discounts |

Note. Theme 1 key patterns identified during analysis.

Participant 6 described compensation as a layered system comprising paying a living wage, stating, “The first thing was living wages. Paying above minimum wage was very important, and it also showed the employees the value of their work.” The participant mentioned locking in a predictable cadence of raises and retention bonuses so employees can see a future at the center, sharing, “We also use incentives as bonuses and longevity pay, like retention bonuses. After six months, you get a raise, after a year, you get a raise.” The participant talked about how economic and caregiving realities intersect in childcare settings and why compensation must be both competitive and tailored, stating, “We also offered health benefits, which I felt like were really important. ... We did not pay them all, but they were subsidized.”

Participant 2 talked about a multi-pronged mix of pay and time benefits, explaining that above-market wages and sign-on bonuses help attract talent, adding, “You know, financially, we would offer sign-on bonuses, and we paid above the market hourly rate, which really set us apart and helped us reduce turnover.” The participant also mentioned that they provide employees with paid time off, sharing, “Uh, we also provided paid time off.” The participant explained that reduced childcare rates are one of the most impactful benefits because they meet a core need of many educators who are parents themselves, stating, “Finally, one of the most impactful benefits we offered was reduced childcare rates.”

Participant 3 mentioned that they give an earned-day-off incentive to reward reliability and create a buffer for life events without penalizing income, narrating, “we do something also EDOs, which are earned days off, which if the teachers don’t work off, in ... a 30-day time frame”. The participant elaborated that small, recurring recognitions can compound alongside wages and insurance to create a sticky, family-friendly package, stating, “We celebrate birthdays, anniversaries, and life achievements. You know, for those teachers, we give discounts for childcare.”

Predictable raise schedules and tenure-based incentives align with arguments that compensation systems should create visible growth to retain qualified staff and protect service quality (Adil et al., 2020). The emphasis on PTO and affordable health benefits mirrors research synthesizing how improved working conditions and targeted supports communicate value and reduce intent to quit among early-childhood educators (Bryant et al., 2023). This theme extends knowledge by

specifying childcare-tailored benefits, reduced tuition for employees' children, and EDOs that operate through Job Embeddedness mechanisms. Tuition discounts and dependable PTO increase sacrifice (valuable benefits employees would forfeit if they left), while transparent raise pathways and family-aligned perks improve fit between work and life. This mapping reflects and elaborates the links-fit-sacrifice model advanced by Holtom et al. (2006) and Mitchell et al. (2001), offering sector-specific illustrations of how embeddedness can be built ethically through bundles of practices rather than single incentives.

#### 4.1.2. Theme 2: Recognizing, Developing, and Empowering Staff

Data supporting this theme were drawn from all the participants (100%). The participants described everyday practices, including structured coaching in classrooms, funded training and credentials, and visible appreciation rituals that helped staff experience progress and pride in their work. The participants paired recognition with growth paths so that praise was not a one-off, but part of a predictable development journey.

Professional growth and identity-building mechanisms are central to why employees stay: job-embedded learning and visible development pathways strengthen attachment by aligning skills and roles and by affirming professional identity (Lee et al., 2014). In addition, trajectories of embeddedness tied to recognition and mastery can catalyze proactive, stay-oriented behaviors, particularly when employees see clear paths to advancement (Li et al., 2022). Table 4 summarizes theme 2 and the key patterns identified during the analysis.

**Table 4.** Theme 2 and key patterns.

| Theme                                         | Key pattern                              |
|-----------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|
| Recognizing, developing, and empowering staff | Coaching and mentoring                   |
|                                               | Professional development and recognition |
|                                               | Training                                 |
|                                               | Clear growth paths                       |
|                                               | Role fit                                 |

Note. Theme 2 key patterns identified during analysis.

Participant 3 described a hands-on coaching model that pairs each new hire with a mentor and brings expert feedback directly into the classroom, stating, "At our school, we designed over 40 processes which introduce the new employee to a current teacher in the building that's been there for a long time. A mentor, teacher ...." The intent is to shorten the learning curve, link staff to experienced peers, and ensure that support is timely and practical, sharing, "And you know that way they can relate to someone who's doing the same thing that they're doing, and ... get the ins and outs of the job."

Participant 1 tied recognition to capability building, explaining that appreciation lands best when employees can also see their skills and credentials grow. The



participant talked about formalizing opportunities for certifications and then celebrated milestones to sustain momentum, adding, “We invested in professional development opportunities, helping staff pursue training and certifications. We encouraged long-term career growth.”

Participant 6 elaborated about making advancement concrete by underwriting required training and naming internal promotion paths so employees could picture a future at the center, expressing, “We used to pay for paid training costs for CPR training, early childhood education certifications, things like that. We offer career ladders for promotion.” The participant mentioned that they add tuition assistance to reduce cost barriers for continued education, sharing, “So, you would come in as a teacher assistant and you know you complete whatever certifications or qualifications you needed to become a teacher.”

These findings affirm the findings by Herzberg (1968) that intrinsic motivators, including recognition, mastery, and responsibility, are associated with job satisfaction and lower turnover among educators, consistent with motivation-hygiene theory. When owners provide classroom coaching, funded credentials, and public appreciation, employees receive clear signals that their growth matters, aligning with the findings by Bryant et al. (2023) that development opportunities and acknowledgement strengthen commitment and reduce intent to quit in childcare contexts. These findings are also consistent with findings by Mitchell et al. (2001) and Holtom et al. (2006) that non-financial recognition and capability building contribute to retention in early education.

#### 4.1.3. Theme 3: Leading Visibly to Nurture Strong Relationships and Culture

All the participants (100%) referenced this theme. The participants emphasized everyday visibility, such as greeting teachers, stepping into classrooms, and checking in on hard days, as the backbone of culture. The participants described open, two-way communication, including staff meetings with time for employee voice, informal rounds, and rapid responses to issues as a deliberate retention lever. This theme indicates that these practices are signals of care that create psychological safety and strengthen bonds among staff. Several participants added that visible leadership is not merely symbolic but includes pitching in when ratios are tight, modeling standards and addressing concerns before they escalate.

Leadership practices that make support visible, frequent check-ins, in-class help, and open two-way communication operate through Job Embeddedness mechanisms by densifying links and strengthening fit with a collaborative culture. Newer job embeddedness theory work shows that identification with leader and team amplifies stay behaviors when employees experience everyday access, voice, and trust (Li et al., 2022); conversely, perceived insecurity weakens attachment unless buffered by supportive leadership (Peltokorpi & Allen, 2023). Cross-study syntheses reinforce that leadership quality is central to teacher retention (Nguyen, 2020); in child-care centers specifically, leader support predicts observed retention above teacher and center covariates (Doromal et al., 2022); and qualitative ECEC studies

detail which leadership practices enable or constrain retention on the ground (Downey, 2024; Garrett & Gibbs, 2025). **Table 5** shows theme 3 and the key patterns identified during the analysis.

**Table 5.** Theme 3 and key patterns.

| Theme                                                       | Key pattern                               |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|
| Leading visibly to nurture strong relationships and culture | Showing up in the classroom               |
|                                                             | Communicating openly                      |
|                                                             | Building trust and personal relationships |
|                                                             | Servant leadership                        |
|                                                             | Regular feedback                          |

Note. Theme 3 key patterns identified during analysis.

Participant 1 talked about enhancing retention by making teachers feel heard and supported, underscoring that presence is ongoing, not a one-time gesture, adding, “We listened to staff. Acted on their behalf when possible, and we made sure that they knew they’d have a voice.” The participant elaborated that they connect voice to the advantages for children and families, emphasizing how stability with staffing occurs by talking to them on a daily basis, stating, “Another important point is that retention strategies don’t just benefit staff. They directly benefit the children and families.” P6 shared that administrators happen to visit the classroom and help when needed, sharing, “Administrative support was very important. As a part of management, I would go in the classroom and help out when I could.”

Participant 8 said that their school schedule begins with a present leader and checking in with each person individually to foster familiarity and care, stating, “So, the biggest thing I do at my school is I really try to get to know my teachers. I’m invested every day when I come in.” The participant narrated that daily touch-points make it easy for teachers to surface needs and for leaders to respond quickly, expressing, “I walk the whole building. I go into every single class and tell my teachers good morning, see how they are, and ask if they need anything.” The participant also mentioned that they hold team building each month to show teachers that they are cared for, narrating, “Also am hosting a little get together or staff team building each month ... where I could just really show them that I care about them.”

A study by Huning et al. (2020) found that servant leadership and perceived organizational support result in reduced turnover intentions via higher satisfaction and embeddedness, conforming to the current study findings that servant leadership is helpful in retaining teachers. Culture-level work that normalizes learning and recognition improves trust and commitment (Canning et al., 2019), aligning with the findings of this study that close relationships with teachers help in building trust and commitment to work. Work resources, such as supportive supervision and collegiality, lead to lower turnover intentions, underscoring why

visible, responsive leaders matter in ratio-bound contexts (Heilala et al., 2023), affirming the current study findings that providing teachers with adequate resources and support helps in retaining them. This theme extends job embeddedness by specifying day-to-day leader behaviors that deepen links, such as frequent owner-teacher interactions, strengthen fit, such as alignment with a supportive, communicative culture, and increase sacrifice, such as leaving would forfeit access to caring leaders and trusted peers.

#### 4.1.4. Theme 4: Designing Operations That Stabilize Work and Sustain Quality

All the participants (100%) supported this theme. The participants described retention as an operational design problem that entails building dependable systems for onboarding, scheduling, ratio coverage and in-class support, so that every day work is sustainable. The participants talked about having structured first days with mentors and clear checklists, flexible but predictable schedules that acknowledge life constraints, and low staff-child ratios with administrators who step in to help. Cross-training and simple coverage rules were used to keep classrooms open without employees experiencing burnout.

Operational design that institutionalizes supports, structured onboarding, predictable schedules, ratio coverage, and accessible admin help stabilizes everyday work and strengthens retention by improving fit (routine clarity; role-life alignment) and links (mentor/backup ties) while raising sacrifice (well-tuned schedules and supports that would be forfeited if leaving) (Holtom & Darabi, 2018; Lee et al., 2004). In ECEC, burnout and strain are attenuated when work systems reduce ambiguity and overload, improving well-being and intent to stay (Jeon et al., 2021). Contemporary analyses link schedule characteristics to educator mental health and burnout risk and recommend flexibility plus paid leave to make teaching sustainable (Cavallari et al., 2023). Table 6 displays theme 4 and the key patterns identified during the analysis.

**Table 6.** Theme 4 and key patterns.

| Theme                                                        | Key pattern                                                                        |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Designing Operations that Stabilize Work and Sustain Quality | Structure onboarding<br>Schedules<br>Ratios<br>Cross-training<br>Classroom support |

Note. Theme 4 key patterns identified during analysis.

Participant 6 explained that retention starts on day one and makes the first impression count, stating, “Retention starts on day one. First impression always matters.” The participant talked about laying out a concrete onboarding routine that introduces the team, clarifies expectations, and assigns a mentor so new teachers are never on an island, sharing, “A strong onboarding process ... Like they knew

what to expect. Clear orientation, always introduce the team, a welcome package, and a mentor.”

Participant 6 mentioned that flexible scheduling was important, stating, “Flexible scheduling was also important.” The participant indicated that they couple flexible start times with lower staff-child ratios and having hands-on administrative support so classrooms remain calm and covered, stating, “We were really flexible with our schedules. We knew you couldn’t come in at 8 o’clock. We wouldn’t put you on a schedule for 8 o’clock, things like that.”

Participant 1 narrated that fully flexible scheduling is hard in ratio-bound classrooms, so they provided paid time off, stating, “Uh, we also provided paid time off. Essentially, since offering completely flexible scheduling was difficult in a classroom setting.” The participant talked about paid time off as a way of providing rest and reducing burnout without disrupting coverage, stating, “But PTO gave staff the balance they needed. Beyond pay and time off.”

The current study findings are consistent with the findings by [Chiat and Panatik \(2019\)](#) and [Herzberg \(1968\)](#) that working conditions and work design, clear processes, manageable workloads and supportive supervision are pivotal hygiene factors that reduce turnover intentions. In ECEC, center and program-level supports, such as staffing, scheduling, and resources, are associated with lower turnover ([Caven et al., 2021](#)), affirming the current study findings that good scheduling and adequate resources help retain teachers. Improving work conditions reduces burnout and stabilizes staffing ([Linzer et al., 2015](#)), and quality of work-life interventions, such as PTO policies, predictable scheduling support satisfaction and retention ([Parveen et al., 2017](#)), aligning with the current study findings. The participants’ emphasis on ratios, coaching, and predictable procedure also aligns with findings by [Bryant et al. \(2023\)](#) that supportive structures are necessary for better staff retention and program quality.

#### **4.1.5. Theme 5: Anchoring Work in Purpose, Community, and Adaptive Growth**

All the participants (100%) referenced the last theme. The participants elaborated that a consistent emphasis on purpose, reminding all staff members that early childhood education has the potential to change lives, celebrating meaningful work, and creating space for growth to respond to changing needs. Meaningfulness of work is a strong predictor of lower turnover intentions, while simultaneously having a positive effect on job satisfaction, demonstrating that connecting that which is done every day to a mission that is valued and worthwhile is indeed effective ([Wandycz-Mejias et al., 2024](#)). Job embeddedness theory states that through the density of links, perceived fit and sacrifice, intention to leave is lessened through existing conditions of work ([Setthakorn, 2024](#)). The participants also emphasized community connection, such as center-led drives, volunteer spotlights and family events, as a practical way to build pride and belonging. Stronger family-teacher relationships are associated with more positive classroom engagement, pointing to a social climate where teachers’ relationship-building efforts yield visible gains

(Roskos, 2023). The participants talked about adaptive growth as they explained making iterative, small changes to practices in response to direct staff feedback, changing generations, and their realities in the classroom and community, in order to sustain the relevance and humane quality of their practices. **Table 7** shows theme 5 and the key patterns identified during the analysis.

**Table 7.** Theme 5 and key patterns.

| Theme                                                     | Key pattern                                        |
|-----------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|
| Anchoring work in purpose, community, and adaptive growth | Purpose and adaptive growth                        |
|                                                           | Community engagement structures                    |
|                                                           | Reinforce the mission of early childhood education |
|                                                           | Partnering with parents                            |
|                                                           | Improving practices                                |

Note. Theme 5 key patterns identified during analysis.

Participant 4 explained that they provide training throughout the year and provide any extra help teachers need, stating, “In our school, we do lots of training throughout the year. We require, as well, to give them any extra help in the classroom as much as we can.” The participant further mentioned that they employ servant leadership and are available when teachers require any form of assistance, “While it’s a servant leadership as far as that goes, if they need help in the classrooms, we make sure that we step in and we help out.”

Participant 5 elaborated about institutionalizing community connection so that staff see themselves as part of something larger than their classroom, stating, “So, we try to pick up things that are available in the community that people can volunteer for if they would like.” The participant talked about the monthly community board that curates volunteering opportunities, highlighting employees’ outside service, and lifts family-focused activities, making contributions visible and valued, sharing, “We have a community board ... And each month it focuses either on family, ... teacher recognition, and there’s community.”

Participant 7 anchored purpose in relationships with families, aligning everyone around child success and teacher well-being. The participant mentioned that when a classroom includes a child with challenging needs, they convene family-school meetings to co-create plans that ease teacher strain and keep learning on track, stating, “... having meetings with the families, try to get them to work with us to reach a common goal to help the teacher so it’s not as difficult for them in the classroom setting.”

Herzberg’s motivation-hygiene lens highlights recognition and growth as intrinsic motivators, while adequate conditions and policies prevent dissatisfaction (Adil et al., 2020; Herzberg, 1968), being consistent with the current study findings that recognition, purpose, and supportive communication bolster satisfaction and reduce turnover intentions. Caven et al. (2021) linked job embeddedness to quality and retention in childcare as centers that cultivate meaning and social

bonds retain staff and sustain service quality, affirming the findings of this study that mission-forward messaging, community visibility, and parent partnerships are practical as owners translate those principles to daily experience. Framing work around mission and community strengthens job embeddedness via fit, including values alignment with early childhood education's purpose, links, including denser ties with colleagues, families, and local partners, and sacrifice, including leaving would mean losing a supportive identity, recognition structures, and community networks, conforming to the findings that available work resources and reduced job insecurity help employees stay, especially in turbulent contexts (Bryant et al., 2023; Dogantekin et al., 2022; Huning et al., 2020; Peltokorpi & Allen, 2023).

The findings of this study align with job embeddedness theory by showing how leaders cultivate the three mechanisms: links, fit, and sacrifice that explain why employees stay (Holtom et al., 2006; Jiang et al., 2012; Lee et al., 2014; Mitchell et al., 2001). Theme 1 primarily strengthens sacrifice and fit. Tuition discounts, PTO, affordable health insurance, and predictable raises increase what employees would forfeit by leaving and align work with family realities, classic job embeddedness theory pathways where tangible and psychological costs and role-life alignment, deter exit (Holtom et al., 2006; Mitchell et al., 2001). Theme 2 deepens links and improves fit, with spillovers to sacrifice. Mentoring, in-class coaching, and recognition rituals densify relational ties, while funded credentials and clear ladders align skills with roles; accrued training and visible advancement become assets employees hesitate to abandon (Holtom et al., 2006; Mitchell et al., 2001).

Theme 3 operationalizes links and fit through everyday access to supportive leaders, voice, and psychological safety. Frequent owner-teacher interactions and responsive problem-solving embed staff in trusting networks and a culture congruent with their values; losing that supportive climate raises perceived sacrifice (Jiang et al., 2012; Lee et al., 2014). Theme 4 institutionalizes fit and links, structured onboarding with mentors, predictable scheduling, ratio coverage, and cross-training, reduces ambiguity and connects staff to reliable supports, while increasing sacrifice by making well-tuned routines and coverage systems costly to give up (Holtom & Darabi, 2018; Lee et al., 2014). Theme 5 heightens fit by aligning daily work with the mission of early childhood education and broadens links through relationships with colleagues, families, and community partners; public recognition and community belonging add identity-based sacrifice if one were to leave (Holtom et al., 2006; Mitchell et al., 2001).

#### **4.2. Business Contributions and Recommendations for Professional Practice**

In this section, I translate the research project's findings into actionable guidance for private childcare owners and center leaders who seek to reduce turnover by strengthening employees' reasons to stay. The five themes identified: (a) providing competitive rewards and family support, (b) recognizing, developing, and em-

powering staff, (c) leading visibly to nurture strong relationships and culture, (d) designing operations that stabilize work and sustain quality, and (e) anchoring work in purpose, community, and adaptive growth, constitute a practicable architecture for retention in small-business childcare settings. The themes work through job embeddedness, as they enhance employee links, increase fit, and raise perceived sacrifice, which in turn lowers turnover intentions and exit behavior (Jiang et al., 2012; Lee et al., 2004; Mitchell et al., 2001). By understanding the themes within this framework, owners can translate insights into routines, policies, and behaviors that leaders can adopt, thereby achieving daily retention benefits rather than relying on a single program (Li et al., 2022; Marasi et al., 2016).

One of the contributions to professional practice is the demonstrated value of a total-rewards stance that is tuned to the realities of early childhood work. Competitive base pay, regular increases, tuition incentives for employees' children, low-cost health insurance options, and sufficient paid leave contribute to reducing the tangible and intangible expenses associated with balancing work and family duties. These practices enhance fit and sacrifice, and, secondarily, strengthen links, as employees perceive leadership as reliable and confident (Jiang et al., 2012; Peltonkorpi & Allen, 2023). Compensation and benefits have a long-lasting positive effect on satisfaction and retention, but they are more sustainable when financial incentives are supported by day-to-day experiences and enabling policies (Adil et al., 2020; Parveen et al., 2017; Pekersen & Tugay, 2020). The compensation is ethically applicable in childcare because it has significantly exceeded comparable areas of care and education, and because it is performance-relevant, as it stabilizes staffing, minimizes replacement expenses, and safeguards service quality (Morrissey & Bowman, 2023). Owners can perform a regular rewards audit, tune wage bands to suit local labor markets, and timetable benefits messages so workers can visualize and budget around the entire value offer.

Turning rewards into repeatable practice requires explicit implementation routines owned by the business. Owners can facilitate pay progression by being consistent with visibly marked milestones of skill and by balancing PTO with staffing quotas to make access to benefits a reality. Effective communication of benefits should occur at onboarding and on a periodic basis thereafter to maintain a salient perception of value. Nonfinancial resources, recognition, development, and supportive leadership can increase commitment and decrease exit cognitions, particularly when the rewards are present, visible, and assessed with fairness and clarity (Adil et al., 2020; Pekersen & Tugay, 2020). Practically, recognition and development pathways should be accompanied by compensation reforms, as they should not be considered in isolation to avoid the benefits being eroded through patchy day-to-day experience. This correlation reflects the accumulation of embeddedness through fit, links, and sacrifice, enhancing the motivation of employees to stay even in the face of outside bids (Jiang et al., 2012; Li et al., 2022).

Another contribution is the viability of recognition, development, and empowerment in everyday leadership. Participants mentioned relying on mentoring, in-



class coaching, funded credentials, and observable advancement ladders. The participants also ritualized recognition; thus, employees were frequently assured in a manner that felt genuine rather than performative. Such practices entrench connection by relational density, and enhance fit by role, skill congruence; and they produce sunk investments (credentials, tenure towards promotion) that employees are wary to give up, increasing loss progressively (Jiang et al., 2012; Lee et al., 2004). Employees who perceive opportunities for development and feel acknowledged by leadership display greater proactivity and commitment, which are antecedents to retention (Li et al., 2022; Marasi et al., 2016). Growth opportunities and recognition are associated with improved well-being, reduced burnout, and job satisfaction in early childhood settings, particularly when autonomy and classroom support are present (Jeon et al., 2021; Xia et al., 2023; Zhao & Jeon, 2023). This can be operationalized by owners through calendar coaching touchpoints, underwriting credential milestones (such as CDA and state credentials), and publishing straightforward career maps demonstrating how tenure, performance, and training translate into advancement.

Effective empowerment is a design problem. When participation platforms are already credible and well-resourced to withstand credible stakeholder involvement, leaders can enhance the voice and discretion of teachers in classroom-related decisions, which in turn forecast job satisfaction and job retention gains in educational settings (Xia et al., 2023; Zhou et al., 2019). In practice, this will involve arranging regular curriculum-planning meetings with administrators present, allocating funds for materials chosen by teachers, and establishing mini-budgets within which team leads can authorize minor expenditures. Burnout risk is reduced when employee agency and support are present, and psychological resources are enhanced, leading to a more favorable learning and retention climate (Jeon et al., 2021; Maslach & Goldberg, 1998; Ng et al., 2023). Participants noted that recognition is frequent, specific, and public in a way that counts, yet not so performative as to diminish authenticity, which aligns with previous study findings that recognition correlates with satisfaction and lower turnover intentions (Parveen et al., 2017; Pekersen & Tugay, 2020).

The third contribution is the centrality of visible leadership and culture, as well as their everyday embeddedness. The presence of owners in classes and their physical availability to address issues built patterns of trust that placed staff members in nurturing systems and mitigated the emotional impact of childcare practices. Availability by owners encourages lower burnout and intention to stay, as stressors are mitigated through social and managerial resources (Hyseni Duraku et al., 2022; Ishibashi et al., 2022; Maslach & Goldberg, 1998). In a childcare setting, well-being resources and a positive climate are positively correlated with satisfaction and lower turnover intentions, indicating a practical payoff for leadership practices that maintain open dialogue and enablement (Zhao & Jeon, 2023). Owners can institutionalize leadership rounding in classrooms, schedule monthly one-on-one check-ins, and implement rapid feedback loops to address pain points be-

fore they solidify into exit intentions. The increasing links and good fit as a result of congruence of values and psychological safety, employees feel more sacrificed by leaving a culture that nurtures the employee and the workplace, which corresponds with the project findings that teachers' contact with the owner is a salient retention force (Jiang et al., 2012; Peltokorpi & Allen, 2023).

Another contribution is stability and quality in operational design. Formal onboarding with mentors, predictable schedules, consistent ratio requirements, and cross-training clarify ambiguities and help classrooms never go without support. These practices enhance fit by making the work navigable and also make it fair, while increasing sacrifice by establishing reliable structures that employees lose upon departure. Previous studies on job insecurity and voluntary turnover have shown that when operational uncertainty is high, turnover increases; conversely, stable systems and clear processes reduce insecurity and mitigate exit (Bryant et al., 2023; Huning et al., 2020; Peltokorpi & Allen, 2023). Operational investments, thus, function as retention infrastructure: a cross-trained float pool cushions absences, onboarding scaffolds early success, and scheduling templates make fairness visible. In centers where staffing volatility has historically undermined trust, these predictable routines can be the turning point that converts good intentions into sustained embeddedness (Jiang et al., 2012). Owners should map the first 90 days of employment, assign a mentor, and post staffing contingency plans so teachers see that the organization will not leave them to absorb shocks alone.

The fifth contribution is anchoring work in mission, community, and adaptive growth. Owners who consistently connected daily tasks to the broader purpose of early childhood education and who built relationships with families and community partners reported stronger employee identification with the center. Prior research in childcare links meaning, social bonds, and recognition to higher retention and sustained quality, indicating that purpose and community are not soft add-ons but core retention levers (Caven et al., 2021; Morrissey & Bowman, 2023). The research project's participants described community boards, family-school meetings for challenging situations, and celebrations that highlighted service and teamwork, practices that broaden links and align personal values with organizational aims (Jeon et al., 2021; Xia et al., 2023). This identity-based embeddedness increases the nonfinancial sacrifice of leaving because employees would forfeit a valued role and community standing (Jiang et al., 2012). Owners should therefore curate regular community-facing moments, family partnership nights, service opportunities, and recognition events that make contributions visible and reinforce a sense of belonging.

These contributions address a documented gap in the applied literature. While many studies catalog factors related to satisfaction and turnover, fewer specify leader-controlled, small-business practices that translate theory into retention routines for private childcare centers. The project findings respond by detailing owner behaviors and operational designs that advance embeddedness without assuming corporate-scale HR infrastructure. This narrows the translational gap be-

tween theory and practice by showing how links, fit, and sacrifice can be intentionally cultivated in resource-constrained settings (Jiang et al., 2012; Li et al., 2022). The literature review in this research project explicitly noted limited information on leadership strategies and initiatives for retention in private childcare facilities, which underscores the practice value of the present themes for owners in similar contexts. Consequently, these findings are most persuasive to leaders who share salient features with the project sites, including organizational size, mission orientation, and operational constraints common to private childcare in Texas.

One of the recommendations is that private childcare owners and center directors should lead multi-quarter plans that sequence rewards calibration, recognition and development pathways, leadership rounding, and onboarding redesign so that each pillar reinforces the others. Lead teachers and program coordinators should co-own mentoring, recognition rituals, and classroom-level decision forums so that empowerment is practiced where work happens. HR generalists or office managers, as present, should maintain compensation bands, benefits communications, and credential-tracking dashboards to keep progress visible and fair. These role-anchored steps align with evidence that satisfaction and embeddedness increase when employees perceive both structural support and genuine interpersonal regard (Jeon et al., 2021; Parveen et al., 2017; Zhao & Jeon, 2023). Embeddedness is cumulative; thus, the highest returns are expected when owners stage implementation in overlapping waves rather than as isolated initiatives (Jiang et al., 2012; Li et al., 2022).

Owners incorporate brief training modules for staff meetings, present implementation cases at state and regional early childhood conferences and contribute practice notes to practitioner outlets and small-business networks. Regional associations and workforce boards can host webinars where owners share staffing stability playbooks built around the five themes, allowing peers to adapt tools to local conditions. Partnerships between local community colleges and training providers can integrate the mentoring and credential pathways into the continuing education domain, forming visible ladders that advance both recruitment and retention. Awareness of embeddedness-oriented design among non-ECE business leaders can be raised through executive roundtables organized via chambers of commerce or small business development centers, highlighting how the design stabilizes frontline workforces and promotes cross-sector learning. Owners can also establish simple evaluation loops to track retention rates, satisfaction indicators, and credential attainment, demonstrating progress and refining interventions over time.

The findings reflect qualitative interpretations from Texas private childcare owners and should therefore be applied to similar contexts rather than to all sectors or geographies. The mechanisms described, links, fit, and sacrifice, are theoretically portable, but their expression in practice depends on local labor markets, licensing regimes, and community dynamics (Jiang et al., 2012; Peltokorpi &

Allen, 2023). Leaders adopting these recommendations should therefore make context-specific adjustments and monitor for unintended consequences, such as workload imbalances during coverage changes or equity gaps in access to advancement.

### 4.3. Implications for Social Change

The project findings suggest a route through which small-business childcare entrepreneurs can influence the social context beyond their centers by stabilizing and dignifying frontline labor. The five themes combine to create a workforce structure that widens worker links, enhances fit, and raises perceived sacrifice, the three processes through which the job embeddedness theory forecasts reduced turnover (Jiang et al., 2012; Mitchell et al., 2001). When owners act on these themes, daily employment is less unpredictable and can be more humane, which may lead to lower turnover rates and safeguard the continuation of care that families demand (Caven et al., 2021). According to Morrissey and Bowman (2023), when adults in classrooms are supported to remain and grow, children have more consistent relationships and instructional routines. Individual employees, family systems, and local communities can benefit from the project's findings by making early care and education more dependable, relationally rich, and developmentally supportive.

At the individual educator level, the project findings suggest that thoughtfully designed retention practices can enhance well-being and professional identity in roles characterized by stress and burnout. Recognition rituals, mentoring, and visible advancement ladders foster a sense of belonging and agency, conditions associated with lower burnout and stronger commitment in early education contexts (Jeon et al., 2021; Ng et al., 2023). Competitive salaries and benefits, combined with reliable working hours and coverage of ratios, fulfill the basic security needs but make access to rest, care about their families, and further education more possible, associated with increased satisfaction and decreased intentions to leave in service work (Adil et al., 2020; Bryant et al., 2023). Reducing job insecurity and making growth opportunities clearer can help owners not experience uncertainty associated with voluntary exit (Huning et al., 2020; Peltokorpi & Allen, 2023). As employees accumulate valued ties, perceive a better person-organization fit, and perceive higher sacrifices in leaving, they are more likely to remain and invest discretionary effort (Jiang et al., 2012; Lee et al., 2004). Practically, it will create a more stable, skilled, and confident workforce, an immediate social good for the adults who do the work, and a precondition for reliable care for the families who depend on them.

For families and children, retention strategies translate into stability of relationships and routines, which are fundamental to trust and learning in early care settings. When turnover ebbs, families encounter fewer disruptions to drop-off rituals, fewer unfamiliar substitutes, and fewer room reassignments, allowing children to maintain bonds with known caregivers and supporting positive behavior and

engagement (Caven et al., 2021). The compensation-quality link underscores that educators with better support are better equipped to deliver richer interactions and more consistent program practices, which can positively impact developmental outcomes (Morrissey & Bowman, 2023). Many households cannot sustain employment without reliable childcare; thus, workforce stability at the center level also supports household earnings continuity and reduces the hidden costs of missed work tied to sudden staffing gaps. In communities with constrained childcare supply, such reliability has significant distributional implications: stable centers reduce family turnover and help prevent long waitlists that deter parents, especially mothers, from entering the labor force. These are tangible improvements in daily life that flow logically from owner actions the project has connected to embeddedness, and they remain within the project's scope by focusing on contexts that resemble the participating Texas centers (Mitchell et al., 2001).

Social change also appears at the organizational and sector levels when owner behavior normalizes humane work design in small enterprises. The project's themes invite owners to make retention a design choice rather than an episodic initiative: pay bands pegged to skills and credentials, scheduled coaching touchpoints, cross-training for coverage, and leadership rounding convert intent into systems (Adil et al., 2020; Holtom et al., 2006; Li et al., 2022). As more centers adopt such routines, peer expectations shift, and networks of practice can propagate standards that prioritize worth and development for the early childhood workforce. Previous studies suggesting performance and citizenship gains from embeddedness indicate that these organizations can become more resilient and innovative over time, creating virtuous cycles of quality and reputation (Holtom & Darabi, 2018; Lee et al., 2004). These moves are owner-controlled and feasible without corporate HR infrastructure; hence, they are actionable in the resource realities of private childcare. The sector-wide message is that every day managerial choices, visible presence, authentic recognition, fair schedules, and structured onboarding are not peripheral; they are the mechanisms by which retention improves and, with it, the social value created by centers that families trust (Caven et al., 2021; Morrissey & Bowman, 2023).

At the community level, improved retention may lead to socioeconomic benefits. More predictable and stable staffing means that centers are less likely to close classrooms or reduce services at short notice (Holtom & Darabi, 2018; Lee et al., 2014). Reliable childcare enables parents and caregivers to remain in the workforce and pursue other opportunities (Bezie et al., 2025; Bryant et al., 2023). Lower staff turnover can also reduce the costs associated with hiring and training, allowing owners to reinvest these savings into wages and improving program. Over time, stable and dependable childcare services may contribute to better community outcomes, such as fewer employment disruptions and better school readiness for children (Adil et al., 2020; Bezie et al., 2025). These outcomes can positively influence community participation, financial security, and wider community well-being (Bryant et al., 2023; Huning et al., 2020).

#### 4.4. Recommendations for Further Research

Future research should extend and strengthen the evidence base that supports the practical strategies identified in this project. Future researchers can design multi-source, longitudinal studies that triangulate owner reports with independent evidence streams and track retention before and after specific strategy rollouts. Pairing interviews with direct observations, document analysis, and objective workforce indicators, such as tenure distributions, quarterly retention rates, absence patterns, and exit-interview summaries, can reduce overreliance on self-report and strengthen claims about what works (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Yin, 2018). Longitudinal studies will also enable the assessment of whether improvements are sustained rather than short-lived, which is particularly important in people-intensive settings, such as childcare. Combining repeated qualitative interviews with time-series retention metrics provides a feasible mixed approach that honors the contextual character of embeddedness while furnishing decision-relevant trend data.

Future research can entail mitigating social desirability bias in future designs by adjusting who collects data, how questions are asked, and how responses are cross-validated. Using trained third-party interviewers who are not affiliated with the local business community can help participants feel more at ease discussing both challenges and successes. Assuring confidentiality and separating identifiable content from analytic files builds on the credibility practices outlined in this project's methods. Incorporating anonymous staff surveys alongside owner interviews provides a second perspective on the same strategy set, while observational traces (such as attendance at coaching sessions, use of PTO after policy changes) offer behavioral checks on perceived enactment. Triangulation across interviews, documents, and records should be pre-specified, with clear rules for reconciling discrepancies to maintain confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). These design choices help mitigate the limitation that interviewees may present practices in an overly positive light, raising confidence that reported strategies were implemented as described and perceived similarly by multiple stakeholders.

Future researchers can broaden the sampling frame beyond Texas private childcare centers to test transferability and surface contextual moderators. Comparative multiple-case studies could sample across states with different licensing regimes, labor markets, and subsidy environments, and include nonprofit, public, and faith-based childcare providers of varied sizes. Job embeddedness theory specifies both on-the-job and off-the-job forces; links, fit, and sacrifice; thus, replication in diverse contexts can clarify which components of the five themes traverse well and which require adaptation, strengthening external validity through literal and theoretical replication (Holtom et al., 2006; Mitchell et al., 2001). Sampling variation in ownership type and community embeddedness would be particularly informative given the theory's emphasis on relational and identity-based anchors to staying.

Future researchers can model the mechanisms and boundary conditions that connect specific strategies to retention outcomes using the already developed con-



structs. Future work can examine whether improvements in perceived links, fit, and sacrifice mediate the relationship between interventions (such as structured onboarding, credential funding, leadership rounding) and retention, thus testing the theorized pathway of job embeddedness in childcare settings (Jiang et al., 2012; Mitchell et al., 2001). In addition, future research should also test moderators relevant to retention, such as job insecurity, workplace climate, and well-being resources, teaching autonomy, and manager influence tactics, to determine when and for whom strategies are most effective (Peltokorpi & Allen, 2023; Reina et al., 2018; Xia et al., 2023; Zhao & Jeon, 2023). This emphasis on mediation and moderation will shift the field from what owners do to why it works and under what conditions, which is crucial for replicability across sites and for the efficient allocation of scarce improvement resources.

Future research can entail evaluating the cost-effectiveness and implementation fidelity of these practices, allowing leaders to prioritize the highest-leverage approaches. Building simple logic models for each theme, mapping activities to short-term embeddedness shifts and then to retention, creates a basis for measuring both outcomes and costs. Tracking direct costs (such as wage adjustments, credential stipends and mentor release time) against savings from reduced turnover, faster time-to-fill, and fewer classroom disruptions would equip owners to make informed tradeoffs. Performance-measurement guidance can inform the development of reliable, consistent operational metrics that withstand stressful conditions and enable fair comparisons across time and sites (Aguinis & Burgi-Tian, 2021). Embedding fidelity checks, such as audit trails for recognition rituals or adherence to onboarding calendars, ensures that null or weak effects can be accurately interpreted as either implementation or theory failures. This line of inquiry is critical to closing the loop from research to managerial decision rules that hold up in the day-to-day work of private childcare.

Since the present project used a pragmatic qualitative design with owners who had already implemented successful strategies, future researchers can sample for variation in performance and stage of implementation to explore adoption trajectories and obstacles. Including centers at different maturity levels, early adopters, mid-stream implementers, and late adopters, would reveal which sequences of actions are feasible under real constraints and how momentum can be maintained. Linking this variation to embeddedness pathways can also clarify whether certain actions (for example, predictable scheduling and ratio coverage) are necessary precursors to others (for example, career-ladder communications), thereby informing practical roadmaps. These studies can remain aligned to the research question and contribute to improved business practice by converting the five themes into implementable sequences that leaders can stage across quarters.

#### 4.5. Limitations

Limitations are inherent in research methods. The following limitations were present in the current research project. First, the research project was limited by self-



reported data. Self-reported data are needed for qualitative studies. Second, the research project was limited by social desirability bias, or the tendency to give answers that reflect well on the participant. Qualitative research data has the potential of being affected by social desirability bias by virtue of the interview process. This limitation was mitigated by ensuring the participants of the confidentiality of data collection process and also by the interviewer maintaining a position of neutrality in their demeanor and in voice inflection. Third, the research project may have been limited by its focus on the private school and daycare center industry. This limitation meant that the results of the research project may not be generalized to other sectors or industries, even those that face functionally similar problems. Fourth, the study was limited by a small sample size of eight participants. While the size of this sample was appropriate for in-depth exploration and data saturation, it could restrict the breadth of perspectives captured, thus limiting the transferability of the findings. Fifth, the geographic focus was on private childcare business owners in Texas, which may limit the applicability of the findings to other regions in the country with different funding structures and regulatory requirements. Finally, although the findings were supported by data triangulation, a substantial portion of the data came from participants' experiences and perceptions, meaning subjective rather than objective interpretations of turnover outcomes.

## 5. Conclusion

The inquiry established a clear answer to the guiding research question by identifying a coherent set of leader-controlled practices that private childcare owners can use to keep valued educators. Five themes were obtained after the analysis: calibrating rewards and family supports, ritualizing recognition and growth, practicing visible and responsive leadership, engineering predictable operations, and anchoring daily work in mission and community. Viewed through job embeddedness, these practices expand employees' links, strengthen fit, and heighten perceived sacrifice, which together make staying the sensible, attractive choice. The findings were consistent across cases and documents, indicating a shared pattern that is understandable to owners and actionable within the constraints of small businesses. A practical architecture for retention was developed, turning everyday decisions about pay, coaching, scheduling, and culture into steady reasons to remain.

When owners stage improvements in rewards, recognition and development, leadership presence, operational reliability, and mission-centered community, they create daily conditions in which educators experience dignity, predictability, and growth. Staff stability then supports consistent relationships and routines for children, reduces disruptions for families, and helps communities rely on care that is open and dependable. The findings revealed concrete steps, clear pay bands, credential pathways, calendared coaching, cross-training for coverage, and genuine forums for teacher voice, as retention improves when supportive structures are

encountered on a weekly basis. Positive social change is therefore proximate and practical: educators gain sustainable careers, children receive steadier care, and families safeguard employment through reliable services. Dissemination through practitioner associations and local training partners can spread these routines without requiring corporate infrastructure.

Multi-source and longitudinal designs can reduce reliance on self-report and show whether gains persist over time, while broader sampling across ownership types and states can test transferability. Mechanism tests that track changes in links, fit, and sacrifice can explain why particular interventions work, and moderator tests can specify the conditions under which effects are strongest. Cost-effectiveness and implementation-fidelity studies can guide owners toward high-leverage actions and clarify sequencing, helping leaders invest scarce resources where they matter most. Sampling for different stages of adoption can reveal feasible pathways from first steps to mature practice, making it easier for late adopters to follow. When leaders intentionally design everyday work to embed people, retention improves, quality is protected, and communities benefit in visible and lasting ways.

## Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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