

The Psychological Contract Theory on Student Retention: A Systematic Literature Review

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Abstract: The purpose of this article is to cover the themes central to psychological contract theory as well as its impact on student retention. While psychological contract theory has been extensively studied and applied in work-related settings, its influence in educational settings has not been fully explored. To address this gap, this study collected and analyzed data following the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines. Data was collected from studies published between 2013 and 2023, resulting in the analysis of 24 eligible papers from various academic databases in the review. Based on the number of eligible papers within a ten-year timeframe indicates a scarcity of research on psychological contracts in educational contexts, particularly concerning student retention. The findings from the 24 eligible papers were synthesized and reported using descriptive analysis and tabulation, thus shedding light on how psychological contract theory influences student retention. The analysis suggests that unfulfilled psychological contracts between students and academic staff can contribute to student attrition, especially when students' expectations, formed during earlier educational experiences, are not met. This systematic literature review emphasizes the importance of the psychological contract in educational settings particularly in managing the dynamic student and academic relationship. The review made suggestions for practical implications for academic leaders, policymakers, and education administrators, stressing the need for adaptive, inclusive, and forward-looking approaches in education, and recommendations for future studies.

Keywords: *Psychological contract, student retention, education, systematic literature review, PRISMA*

1. Introduction and Background

In the evolving landscape of higher education, understanding and addressing the complex expectations that students bring to university settings is crucial for fostering a successful academic experience. Students arrive at universities with diverse expectations shaped by personal aspirations, cultural backgrounds, socioeconomic influences, and prior educational experiences (Tinto, 1993). These expectations, when unmet, can significantly influence student retention. Faculty members, especially academic staff, play a vital role in meeting these expectations, which is essential for maintaining student interest and promoting retention.

The theory of psychological contract, introduced by Argyris (1960) and later expanded by Rousseau, primarily addresses the implicit expectations in employer-employee relationships. This theory has gained significant traction in the field of organizational studies particularly to understand employee behavior and retention. However, it has significant implications for educational environments as well. Recently, researchers have applied psychological contract theory to examine students' expectations of higher education institutions, focusing on the psychological contracts formed between students and their academic staff (Itzkovich, 2021).

In an organizational context, a psychological contract refers to an individual's beliefs about mutual obligations in an exchange relationship, such as employment. These beliefs are rooted in perceived promises that both parties must honor (Rousseau, 2000), with shared responsibilities benefiting the organization (Gorde, 2019). This unwritten agreement is crucial for determining employee engagement and is based on how employees interpret their relationship with their employer (Zacchaeus, 2021). Similarly, in educational settings, psychological contracts are formed between students and academic staff, shaping students' academic experiences and influencing their decisions to remain at an institution.

The fulfillment of psychological contracts in educational contexts is vital for student retention. Retaining students benefits institutions financially and academically while also contributing to broader national economic growth, as education is closely linked to individual and societal development. Despite extensive research on student retention, few studies have approached the topic from a psychological perspective. This

study aims to fill that gap by reviewing the impact of psychological contracts on student retention, focusing on research published over the past decade.

2. Literature Review on psychological contract in an organizational setting

Rousseau (1989), a key figure in psychological contract theory, defines a psychological contract as the expectations and beliefs individuals hold about their mutual agreement in a relationship. This concept has been widely studied across various industries, including banking (Gulzar et al., 2021; Ngobeni et al., 2022), hospitality (Arasli et al., 2019), public and private sectors (Yu, 2022; Zacchaeus, 2021), mining (Li & Chen, 2018), social services (Battisti et al., 2007; Welander et al., 2020), automotive (Liu et al., 2020), aviation (Löffert & Diehl, 2023), and both small and large-scale industries (Ntalianis & Dyer, 2021; Choi et al., 2019). Across these diverse industries, this highlights that psychological contracts play a critical role in understanding the dynamics of employee retention.

In an organizational setting, the psychological contract is mostly built around the expectation that employers should provide job security, fair compensation, and opportunities to grow with the organization, which focuses on favorable working conditions for employees. Employers too pose expectations that employees must be loyal, committed, and productive. When both parties fulfill these expectations, a positive working relationship is possible, leading to better employee attitudes and behaviors (Gorde, 2019). This reciprocal relationship is in line with the social exchange theory, which suggests that when expectation, promises or the contract is honored employees are motivated to maintain the relationship and stay in the employment.

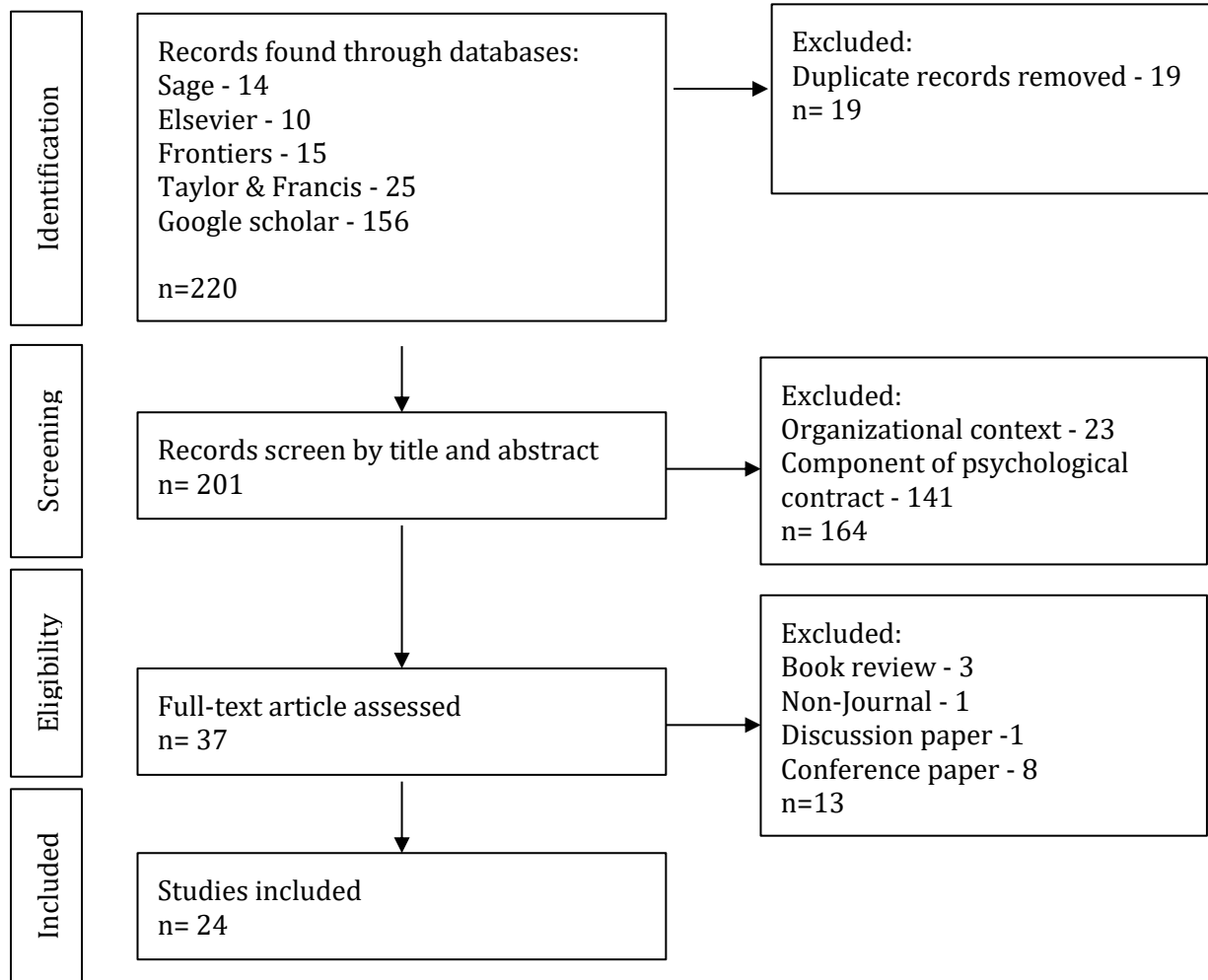
Since psychological contracts are extremely personal and vary between individuals, making them vulnerable to both breaches and positive reinforcement. Whether the contract is honored or not, it can significantly influence the relationship between the employee and the employer, affecting important outcomes such as job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and turnover intentions. This dynamic has been explored across numerous sectors, including the military (Kiili, 2016; Kraak et al., 2022; Lu, 2020; Pohl et al., 2016; Soares & Mosquera, 2019) and healthcare (Collins & Beaugard, 2020; Grama, 2020), where the psychological contract plays a crucial role in employee retention.

While psychological contracts have been extensively studied in organizational settings, there is limited study in higher education. For universities that value students highly, understanding and meeting students' expectations are essential for fostering long-term engagement and retention. However, the literature on psychological contracts in educational settings, particularly in relation to student retention, remains scarce (Koskina, 2013; Beenen & Arbaugh, 2019). This study seeks to fill this gap by exploring how psychological contracts between students and academic staff can influence retention rates in higher education institutions.

3. Methodology

This systematic review process was guided by the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) framework, as depicted in Figure 1. PRISMA provides a standardized framework that ensures a thorough and transparent review process and places importance on the quality and reproducibility of systematic reviews. The process incorporates four main steps; identification, screening, eligibility and finally inclusion.

Figure 1: Reporting items for the systematic review (adapted from the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews (PRISMA) statement).



A review protocol was established, detailing the search strategy, data extraction process, data analysis methods, and article selection criteria which are discussed next.

Data Sources and Search Strategies

After defining the research objective, the author conducted systematic searches using electronic databases including SAGE, Elsevier, Frontiers, Taylor & Francis, and Google Scholar. The search focused on articles published between 2013 and 2023, with keywords such as "psychological contract" AND "student retention" OR "retention". Multiple databases were used to capture a wide range of perspectives on the topic.

Table 1: Keywords applied during the systematic literature review process

Databases	Keyword
SAGE	"psychological contract" AND "student retention" OR "retention"
Frontiers	
Taylor & Francis	
Google Scholar	

Selection of Studies: Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The selection process involved three rounds. The first round involved screening titles and abstracts, followed by a detailed analysis of the articles' relevance to the research topic. In the final round, full-text articles were thoroughly reviewed, and those not addressing psychological contract-related student retention were excluded.

Titles and abstracts were initially screened to assess their relevance. Table 2 guided the selection of the study to be included in this systematic literature review. Only articles that were written in English, in peer-reviewed journals, available in full-text, written between 2013 to 2023 were included. Plus, a paper that has students as participants in the study was included in this review.

Unpublished theses and dissertations, book reviews, conference papers for the period under review in this study were not included in the articles for the analyses in the PRISMA. Also, articles that were published before 2013 were not included in the analyses and articles published after December 2023. Papers with participants that did not involve students were excluded from this study. Other reasons for exclusion are mentioned in the adapted PRISMA flow diagram in Figure 1.

Table 2: Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Criteria	Inclusion	Exclusion
Year	From 2013 to 2023	Anything published before 2013
Access	Open access	Close access
Document Type	Full-text article	Book review, conference paper, unpublished thesis and dissertation
Source type	Peer-reviewed journal	Book, conference paper
Language Subject	English language	Other than English language
Participant	Student	Employees

Data Extraction Process and Quality Assessment

Data from the selected studies were systematically recorded in an evidence table (see Table 3, in Section 3.0). The extraction process focused on capturing key information relevant to the research questions.

4. Results

The systematic review yielded a total of 24 relevant articles from the initial pool of 220. In the first round of screening, a total of 19 duplicates were removed which makes 201 sources remain for screening of title and abstract based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria (Table 2). A total of 165 were excluded for all the reasons in Table 2, and upon a complete reading of each article, another 13 were removed, of which only 24 were included in this systematic literature review.

Table 3 describes all 24 articles included in this review. The articles were tabulated according to author, year, and title, the objectives of the study, sample, method, and analysis as well as the primary findings of the studies. These articles were then tabulated according to several dimensions, including publication trends, journal distribution, author contributions, and the tools and techniques employed in the studies.

Table 3: Psychological contract and student retention articles included in the SLR

Author, Year & Title	Objective	Sample & Method	Analysis	Findings
Author: Barnhill, Czekanski & Turner (2013) Title: Psychological Contracts and Student-Athlete	To examine the impact that perceived breaches of psychological contracts have on student-athletes effective outcomes	Sample: 258 student-athletes Method: Questionnaire	CFA	Athletic departments should stress to their coaches the importance of clear communication lines with their student-athletes
Author: Koskina (2013) Title: What does the student psychological contract mean?: Evidence from a UK business school	Explores the concepts and relationships that students attach to the psychological contract	Sample: Postgraduate students Method: Interview	-	Students' perceptions were supplemented with academics' perceptions, to give a more rounded picture of the student psychological contract
Author: Barnhill & Turner (2015) Title: The Impact of Psychological Contract Breach on Student-athlete Perceived in-role-performance and Organizational Citizenship Behavior	To explore how psychological contracts affect student-athletes behaviors and performance	Sample: 248 student-athletes Method: Questionnaire	IBM SPSS	Psychological contract breaches might affect student-athletes differently than other types of organizational members
Author: Pleitz, MacDougall, Terry, Buckley & Campbell (2015) Title: Great expectations examining the discrepancy between expectations and experiences on college student retention	Evaluating the degree to which the discrepancy between student expectations and experiences can result in greater rates of attrition in education	Sample: 225 students Method: Questionnaire	Logistic Regression Results	Students are entering higher education with an inaccurate idea of what college life will be like. Students have preconceived notions and corresponding expectations concerning social life, institutional characteristics, and academic rigor. Students who reported a greater discrepancy in their expectations and experiences within the social areas of the institution were also more likely to leave
Author: Glazier (2016) Title: Building rapport to improve retention and success in online classes	To hypothesize that the difficulty of establishing student-instructor rapport in online classes contributes to lower student success	Sample: 465 online students Method: Interview	Means tests, logit models, and OLS regression	The students in the rapport condition feel like the instructor is engaged and accessible, and this perception translates into measurably better outcomes for students
Author: Klapproth, Schaltz, Brunner, Fischbach, Ugen & Martin (2016) Title: Short-term and medium-term effects of grade retention in Secondary School on academic Achievement and Psychosocial Outcome Variables	To examine how grade retention in secondary school would affect students' academic achievement and psychosocial adjustment	Sample: 2,835 students who completed primary school and in the sixth grade Method: Questionnaire	MANOVA	Grade retention resulted in short-term benefits for the retained students but in the medium term, there were no significant differences between the retained and promoted students in academic achievement
Author: Wofford (2016) Title:	To gain a deeper understanding of one teacher's perceptions of	Sample: 518 elementary students	Observation chart	Retention in kindergarten was a common practice that used to address the needs of

Retention in Kindergarten A Case Study of Teacher	retention in kindergarten, the feedback she gave students she felt were at risk of being retained, and the interventions she used with these students	Method: Interview	students and classroom teachers
Author: Yucel-Aybat, Gibney, Masters & Amlie (2018) Title: A Social Exchange Perspective on Student Retention and University Support Intentions	To provide a more comprehensive explanation of student support and conversely, exit in an institutional context	Sample: 468 undergraduates Students Method: Questionnaire	AMOS 22.0. Students who believe that the university is fulfilling its obligations are less likely to leave the school
Author: Budiman (2018) Title: Factors Related to Students' Drop Out of a Distance Language Learning	Examined the reasons for dropping out of a distance language learning program offered by an open university in Indonesia	Sample: 405 students Method: Questionnaire	NVivo Some students enrolling in the program of studies have very limited knowledge and understanding of distance learning, including self-managed learning
Author: Yang, Chen, Rhodes & Orooji (2018) Title: A longitudinal study on risk factors of grade retention among Elementary school students using a multilevel analysis focusing on material hardship and lack of school engagement	Examines the relationship between material hardship, school engagement, and grade retention among elementary school children	Sample: 4329 students Method: Interview	Chi-square, T-tests Children in families experiencing material hardship need interventions not only for basic needs but also for interventions that increase levels of engagement in school
Author: Ampofo-Ansah, Antiaye & Ampofo Ansah (2019) Title: Psychological contracts between university students and lecturers	Investigated the psychological contract between lecturers and students	Sample: 30 respondents: 15 first-year students 10 second-year students 5 academics from the lecturer Method: Interview	- Students learning enthusiasm was promoted by lecturers performing their desired behavior, while students' learning initiative and efficiency are damaged when lecturers' desired behavior is unfavorable
Author: Beenen & Arbaugh (2019) Title: Flipping Class: Why Student Expectations and person situation fit matter	To explore why flipped classes may have both benefits and pitfalls	Sample: 96 undergraduates students Method: Questionnaire	CFA Students who expected traditional in-person lecture-based instruction, yet received flipped instruction (indicative of contract violation) were less satisfied and less intent on taking a flipped class later, yet they showed more in-class effort than students who expected and received traditional instruction
Author: Bordia, Bordia, Milkovitz, Shen & Restubog	Examine the content, formation, and fulfillment of international student	Sample: 57 internationals	- International students use social and institutional sources to create the

<p>(2019) Title: What do international students really want: An exploration of the content of International students' psychological contract in business education</p>	<p>psychological contracts students (Male 47, female 10)</p> <p>Method: Interview</p>	<p>contract, which, when fulfilled, leads to positive educational and psychological outcomes</p>
<p>Author: Russell & Jarvis (2019) Title: Student Withdrawal Retention and Their Sense of Belongings in their words</p>	<p>Provides insight into the students' experiences of non-continuation in one English University</p> <p>Method: Interview</p>	<p>- Most students interviewed in this study experienced a mixture of internal and external factors that lead to their non-continuation</p>
<p>Author: Ugwuanyia, Ndujib, Elejerec & Omeke (2020) Title: Effect of Flipped Classroom and Think Pair Share Strategy on Achievement and Retention Among Senior Secondary School Physics Students</p>	<p>To determine the effect of flipped classrooms and think pair share strategy on achievement and retention among senior secondary school physics students</p> <p>Method: Questionnaire</p>	<p>ANCOVA The flipped classroom is superior in enhancing the achievement and retention of physics students</p>
<p>Author: Haverila & McLaughlin (2020) Title: Variables Affecting the Retention Intentions of students in higher education institutions: A Comparison between International and Domestic Students</p>	<p>To investigate the differences between domestic and international students with regard to the variables affecting students' retention intentions.</p> <p>Method: Questionnaire</p>	<p>ANOVA The flipped classroom is superior in enhancing the achievement and retention of physics students</p>
<p>Author: James (2022) Title: Students as Stakeholders Understanding Expectations Can Increase Student Retention</p>	<p>To answer the following research question: RQ1: What is the relationship between adult students expectations of time commitment, technical and computer skills, and level of difficulty in their online classes and their academic persistence in the Phoenix Success Series?</p> <p>Method: Questionnaire</p>	<p>SPSS version 25 This study's findings provide insight into what students perceive in relation to time commitment, required technical and computer skills, and difficulty level for online classes, and how this perception might predict the degree to which they persisted in online courses</p>
<p>Author: Itzkovich (2021) Title: Constructing and validating students' psychological contract violation scale</p>	<p>To construct and validate the efficient measurement of the violations of the student-faculty psychological contract, capturing the different dimensions of</p> <p>Method: Questionnaire</p>	<p>PFI Students expect to be emotionally involved in the process, feel it, be engaged with it, and consequently, emotionally aroused</p>

	such violations	undergraduates College students		
		Method: Questionnaire		
Author: Loukeris & Soulis (2021)	Examined the impact of students' retention with ASD in their cognitive and social domain	Sample: 110 students	Tukey HSD Post Hoc Test	The most significant improvement regarding retention is shown by the students with ASD who visit the integration class
Title: Retention in Kindergarten for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder Improvement Delusion or Both		Method: Questionnaire		
Author: Robertson (2021)	Reviews some literature illustrating divergent views regarding kindergarten retention	Sample: 40 children	-	It is agreed that careful attention should be given to the decision to retain or promote children in kindergarten
Title: To retain or not retain a review of literature related to kindergarten retention				
Author: Boyd, Liu & Hirisian (2022)	To examine if a sense of community (which contains a subconstruct of belonging) is a better predictor of satisfaction and retention perceptions compared with academic achievement and engagement	Sample: 3,600 undergraduate enrollments	AMOS CFA	Human connection and a sense that one belongs within a social group are powerful
Title: Impact of Community Experiences on Student Retention Perceptions and Satisfaction in Higher Education		Method: Questionnaire		
Author: Mcculloh (2022)	Explored the parental support that promoted retention of rural FGCSs attending a small, private university, where withdrawal rates of this population are higher than that of continuing-generation students	Sample: 12 rural first generation college student	A qualitative inductive analysis	Support from those with whom they have close relationships, particularly parents, contributed to their accomplishments
Title: An exploration of parental support in the retention of rural first-generation college students		Method: Interview		
Author: Pedler, Willis & Nieuwoudt (2022)	To explore the relationships between university students' sense of belonging and student retention	Sample: 578 participants	ANOVA	University students' sense of belonging is important to higher education institutions as it increases students' academic motivation and enjoyment in their studies, which can impact student achievement and reduces the likelihood of students considering leaving university before completing their studies, thus contributing to student retention
Title: A sense of belonging at university student retention, motivation and enjoyment		Method: Questionnaire		
Author: Tantry & Sofi (2022)	(1) To see how CAI compares to the lecture method when it	Sample: All students in class 10th	T-test	Learners who received computer-assisted training recalled more fundamental facts than pupils who received
Title: Effectiveness of computer-aided				

instruction in academic achievement and retention of biological sciences secondary school students of Kashmir division

comes to how well class 10th students do in biological science

lecture-based teaching

(2) To compare class 10th students' retention levels in biology after being taught using the CAI technique versus the lecture mode of instruction

Author:

Fan, Trimble, Kember, Muir, Douglas, Wang, Masters & Mainsbridge (2023)

Title:

Supporting engagement and retention of online and blended-learning students

Investigated the perceptions of students in online and blended-subjects, regarding both the academic and institutional support they were provided

Method:

Interview

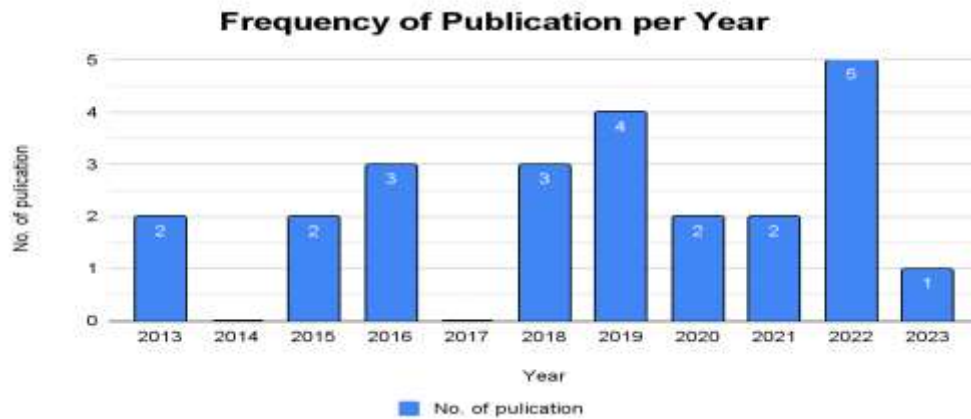
Iterative thematic analysis

Lack of adequate support for purely online students at the institutional/central level and the school level

Analysis of Publication Trends

The number of publications per year between 2013 and 2023 is shown in Figure 2. The highest number of publications occurred in 2022, with a total of five articles. The lowest publication years were 2014 and 2017, with no articles published.

Figure 2: Frequency of publication per year



List of Papers per Journal

Table 4 presents the distribution of articles across various journals. The "Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory, and Practice" published the most articles, with a total of four.

Table 4: List of Journal

No.	Journal	No. of Journal
1	Journal for the Study of Sports and Athletes in Education	1
2	Advances and Applications in Mathematical Sciences	1
3	ASEAN Journal of Open Distance Learning	1
4	Children and Youth Services Review	1
5	Frontiers in psychology	1

6	International Journal of Sciences: Basic and Applied Research	1
7	Journal of Applied Sport Management	1
8	Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory and Practice	4
9	Journal of Curriculum and Teaching	1
10	Journal of Further and Higher Education	1
11	Journal of International Students	1
12	Journal of Political Science Education	1
13	Learning and Individual Differences	1
14	Philanthropy & Education	1
15	Research in Educational Administration & Leadership	1
16	Scientific Research Publishing	1
17	Studies in Higher Education	2
18	The Australian Educational Researcher	1
19	The International Journal of Management Education	1
20	The Journal for Undergraduate Ethnography	1
TOTAL		24

Publication by Authors

Table 5 summarizes the authorship patterns. Articles authored by a single individual and those with more than three authors each contributed 29.17% of the total, while articles with two or three authors contributed 20.83% each.

Table 5: Authors' Contribution

Number of authors	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Single author	7	29.17%
Two authors	5	20.83%
Three authors	5	20.83%
More than three authors	7	29.17%
TOTAL	24	100.00%

Tools and Techniques Applied

The studies employed a range of tools and techniques, with Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), AMOS, and SPSS being among the most frequently used. Table 6 provides a detailed breakdown of the tools and techniques mentioned in the reviewed articles.

Table 6: Tools and techniques mentioned

Tools & techniques	No. of papers
AMOS	2
ANCOVA	1
ANOVA	2
MANOVA	1
CFA	3
Chi-square	1
Iterative thematic analysis	1
Logistic Regression Results	1
Cronbach's alphas	1
Means tests, logit models, and OLS regression	1
NVivo version 10	1
Observation chart	1
PFI	1
Smart PLS Program	1
SPSS	2
T-test	1

Fields of Knowledge

The reviewed articles covered various fields of knowledge, including kindergarten, sports, physics, biology, business studies, and higher education. A significant portion of the articles did not specify a particular field, reflecting the broad applicability of the psychological contract concept.

Table 7: Number of papers by field of knowledge.

Field of Knowledge	N
Kindergarten	2
Sports	1
Physics	1
Biology	1
Business	2
Primary school	1
International and domestic education	1
Higher education	1
English Education	1
Elementary school	1
Not specified	12
TOTAL	24

Strengths and Limitations

This review followed the PRISMA guidelines to ensure a comprehensive search and selection process. By broadening the search terms and databases, the review aimed to capture a wide range of relevant studies. However, the study was limited to 24 articles from 20 journals, which may not fully represent the global research landscape.

Discussion

This section presents the findings from the systematic literature review (SLR) in alignment with the research themes that guided the analysis. The analysis of the objectives, methodologies, and outcomes of the included studies reveals a significant impact of the psychological contract on student retention in educational contexts. Notably, when students perceive that their expectations and the promises made by their institutions are fulfilled, they are more likely to remain enrolled and continue their studies until completion.

5. Psychological Contract from the Student Perspective (Higher Education Students)

Koskina (2013) explored students' understanding of the psychological contract in a higher education context. Her findings suggest that the psychological contract perceived by students differs from that in employment contexts. Students primarily expect the university to provide necessary learning resources in exchange for their tuition fees, and they expect instructors to deliver quality education, while they, in turn, engage and participate actively in learning activities.

Beenen & Arbaugh (2019) examined the psychological contract in the context of flipped classrooms. Their study found that students who anticipated traditional teaching methods but experienced flipped instruction perceived this as a breach of the psychological contract, leading to dissatisfaction. However, these students still demonstrated increased effort in the classroom despite their dissatisfaction, indicating complex reactions to perceived breaches in the psychological contract.

Fulfillment of the Psychological Contract in Students

The concept of psychological contract fulfillment, where both parties meet their expectations, was found to be critical in fostering positive educational outcomes. Bordia et al. (2019) conducted a study on international students in Australian business schools, finding that fulfillment of the psychological contract led to positive psychological and educational outcomes. This was further supported by Aybat (2018), who found that psychological contract fulfillment is linked to higher student retention and future alumni engagement.

Breach of the Psychological Contract in Students

Conversely, breaches in the psychological contract, where expectations are unmet, often lead to negative outcomes. Barnhill et al. (2013) explored the impact of perceived breaches in psychological contracts among student-athletes, revealing that such breaches negatively affect their emotional and academic engagement. This was echoed in Itzkovich (2021), where unmet expectations by faculty members led to perceived breaches, negatively impacting student motivation and learning experiences.

Pleitz (2015) linked breaches in psychological contracts to higher attrition rates, noting that a significant gap between student expectations and actual experiences contributes to student dropout. Similarly, Ampofo (2019) found that breaches in psychological contracts, particularly when lecturers failed to meet student expectations, led to decreased student enthusiasm and a reluctance to recommend the institution to potential new students.

Connection with Teachers and Retention

Glazier (2016) highlighted the importance of teacher-student connections in promoting student retention, particularly in online learning environments. The study found that students who felt a strong connection with their instructors were more likely to succeed and continue their studies, emphasizing the role of instructor rapport in improving retention rates.

Retention Across Educational Levels

Retention strategies have been examined across various educational levels. In kindergarten, Loukeris (2021) found that retention practices significantly benefited students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in both

social and cognitive domains. At the elementary level, Wofford (2016) observed that retention is often used to prepare students for subsequent grade levels, while Mi Youn Yang (2018) identified a correlation between low school engagement and grade repetition.

In secondary education, Klapproth et al. (2016) and Christian et al. (2020) demonstrated that retention strategies, such as grade repetition and flipped classrooms, can have both positive and negative impacts on student academic achievement and psychosocial adjustment.

Retention in Higher Education

Retention in higher education is influenced by various factors, including university support and the sense of community. Russell & Jarvis (2019) and Boyd et al. (2022) emphasized the importance of a supportive university environment in promoting student retention. Pedler, Willis, and Nieuwoudt (2022) found that students with a strong sense of belonging were more motivated and likely to persist in their studies. McCulloh (2022) also identified the critical role of parental support in the retention of first-generation college students.

Retention in Online and Distance Learning

Retention challenges are also prevalent in online and distance learning contexts. Budiman (2018) and James (2022) identified factors such as poor teaching quality, lack of communication, and insufficient student-teacher interaction as significant contributors to dropout rates in online courses. Effective communication and support mechanisms were found to be essential in mitigating these challenges and improving retention in online education.

Retention Among International and Domestic Students

Haverila and McLaughlin (2020) examined the differences in retention factors between international and domestic students, finding that while both groups face similar challenges, international students have unique needs that must be addressed by educational institutions to enhance retention.

In summary, the review highlights the critical role of the psychological contract in shaping student retention across various educational levels and contexts. The findings underscore the need for educational institutions to understand and manage student expectations effectively to foster positive educational outcomes and reduce attrition.

Conclusion

This systematic review has delved into the intricate relationship between psychological contracts and student retention, spanning from kindergarten to higher education and across various learning environments, including traditional, online, and distance education. Our exploration underscores how crucial it is for educational institutions to understand and manage students' expectations and experiences, as these factors heavily influence their decisions to stay or leave.

The review highlights a clear pattern: when students feel that their expectations are met and their needs are supported, they are more likely to stay committed and engaged with their studies. On the other hand, when these expectations are not fulfilled, dissatisfaction grows, which can lead to students dropping out or losing motivation. Building strong, supportive relationships between students and faculty, as well as creating a welcoming and inclusive environment, are essential steps toward enhancing student retention.

Our findings also point to the importance of aligning institutional practices with the diverse needs of students, particularly in online and distance learning settings. Ensuring that students feel connected and supported can make a significant difference in their academic journey.

There's still much to explore in this field. Future research could benefit from examining a wider range of sources and including students from various educational levels and backgrounds to gain a more comprehensive understanding. By addressing these gaps, we can develop more effective strategies to support students and improve retention rates.

In summary, understanding and managing psychological contracts is key to fostering a positive educational experience. By focusing on students' needs and expectations, educational institutions can build a stronger, more supportive environment that encourages students to stay and succeed.

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