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Table of Contents

1.0 Introduction	3
1.1 Background	3
1.2 Research aim	3
1.3 Research objectives	3
1.4 Research questions	4
2.0 Literature review	4
3.0 Methodology	6
3.1 Research philosophy	6
3.2 Research design	6
3.3 Research approach	6
3.4 Research strategy	6
3.5 Data collection method	7
3.6 Sample size and sampling technique	7
3.7 Data analysis	7
3.8 Ethical considerations	7
4.0 Expected findings	8
5.0 Limitations	8
6.0 Timeframe	9
7.0 Conclusion	9
References	10

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Background

The UK fashion industry is one of the economic sectors, contributing £32 billion to the UK economy and employing more than 890,000 people (Elkady, 2024). This indicates that the increasing number of employees in the sector is international students studying in the UK, working either part-time or shifting to full-time jobs after graduation. 679,970 international students are pursuing higher education in the UK, and many of them are aiming to search for jobs in the fields of creative and fashion (Universities UK, 2024).

Cultural diversity, creative thinking, global market awareness, and innovative thinking have valuable attributes in fashion organisations, according to international students. However, the international students are facing a retention issue due to the limitations on work, the visa uncertainty, low initial salary, and the lack of opportunities for career advancement, in addition to poor support from the management (Sharma, 2024). Hence, it is necessary to determine the effective practices in talent management and retention to ensure that fashion companies have a motivated workforce.

1.2 Research aim

The research will aim to investigate the most suitable talent management and retention strategy for foreign students or employees working in fashion companies in the UK.

1.3 Research objectives

- To identify the role of management strategies in talent retention and employee support.
- To evaluate the different talent retention and management strategies responsible for effectively influencing and supporting international student employees in fashion organisations.
- To analyse the scopes and barriers in talent retention and management strategies to influence the international student employees in the UK in the fashion industry.
- To look for strategies in enhancing engagement, productivity, and loyalty among international students in the fashion sector.

1.4 Research questions

What are the main talent retention and management strategies that effectively influence and support the international students in the UK fashion sector?

2.0 Literature review

a. Management strategies' role in employee support and retention of talent

Brandstetter (2023) mentioned that onboarding, line-manager support, clear progression, and inclusion policies are management strategies that are influential in determining the retention of international students in a job. Hristov and Appolloni (2022) further argued that organisations with structured learning and managers' support improved retention and increased engagement, whereas ad-hoc or indifferent management results in turnover. According to the study by Garavan (2023), organisations prioritise an emphasis on talent retention through L&D and wellbeing. However, it warns that L&D may not always be aligned properly with people's priorities, which disrupts its effectiveness in retaining talent unless carefully planned. Furthermore, Ezeafulukwe et al. (2024) emphasise that the diverse hires (such as international students) need to be turned into long-term employees through inclusive management practices. Particularly, most of the interventions in management are not successful as they do not consider visa/immigration issues and additional non-work support that international students require (flexible working hours, mentoring, assistance with sponsorship opportunities). Therefore, management strategy is effective without the inclusion of HR best practice alongside immigration-conscious, culturally sensitive support.

b. Comparison of various talent retention and management approaches to support international students

The strategies that have been analysed in the study include training and career development, structured onboarding and mentoring, and visa/sponsorship support. Ahmed (2021) mentions that mentoring and official onboarding are also useful in helping new entrants to learn the work culture and lower turnover. However, Kuyken et al. (2021) argued that individual strategies (one training course) have a limited impact, whereas the combination of long-term programmes (training, mentoring, managerial accountability, and visa clarity) is most effective to maintain the diverse work culture. Therefore, the workload and the high percentage of part-time jobs highlight that

career advancement needs to be calculated (micro-credentials, flexible progression), otherwise the development will not lead to retained talent. The Two-Factor Theory presented by Herzberg states that the hygiene factors (pay, conditions, policies) lead to dissatisfaction, whereas motivators (growth, responsibility, achievement) facilitate satisfaction. In the study context, retention is enhanced when fashion companies provide their international students with a stable working environment and give them a chance to acquire skills.

c. Talent retention and management strategies, barriers, and scopes for the UK international students

Fashion companies have a chance to integrate talent management to access talent and language in the global marketplace. This sector promotes diversity and inclusion to promote a diverse workforce within its organisations. However, Feeney et al. (2023) mentioned the barrier due to immigration policy and visa uncertainty, indicating that the visa rules are changing and becoming complex. This uncertainty is also a hindrance for employers to provide long-term contracts or sponsorship, which leads to high employee turnover. Besides that, NAIR et al. (2024) further said that the barrier regarding the precarious working patterns in fashion (seasonal, part-time) means it is more difficult to design long-term careers with the students. Amarakoon and Colley (2023) argued that the absence of HR ability is the major concern in small fashion companies, where not all SMEs have effective HR systems to provide systematic retention programmes. There are also systemic exploitation risks in the fashion sector that depend on migrant labour, highlighting that some employers can actively discourage poor practice reporting and disrupt retention (Saylon, 2022). Therefore, strategies are required to overcome policy limitations (sponsorship availability), reshape roles to develop, and develop sector-wide HR competencies. According to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, human beings are driven by five hierarchical needs, like physiological needs, safety needs, social belonging needs, esteem needs, and self-actualisation needs (Canbolat and Hisar, 2022). In this research, the international student workers require a good salary while working and job security (physiological and safety), social support and belonging (belonging), appreciation (esteem), and growth (self-actualisation) in order to enhance the business success in UK fashion companies.

3.0 Methodology

3.1 Research philosophy

The positivism research philosophy will be chosen because the research will collect measurable and statistical information instead of involving the collection of subjective opinions. Positivism will enable the research to be objective and unbiased, which will be beneficial when analysing the relationship between the talent management strategies and retention strategies. Positivism will be suitable since the research will be designed to determine patterns that can be generalised among international student employees in the fashion industry within the UK, which will help test statistical values and factual interpretation.

3.2 Research design

The study will adopt an exploratory research design, which will focus on understanding the trends and issues regarding the employment of international students within the UK fashion industry. The design will evaluate which strategies are used and how they influence retention by developing the skills among international students. The exploratory design will also enable the researcher to make new findings rather than testing pre-existing hypotheses. Since retention within fashion organisations is a dynamic phenomenon, an exploratory design will help develop a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon.

3.3 Research approach

The deductive research approach will be selected for the study, where the study will start by reviewing the reasons behind employee motivation and retention theories, including Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and Herzberg's Two Factor theories, and then proceed to a specific concept regarding international student employees in UK fashion firms. This will be useful in making the research area of management strategies in enhancing retention, which will be verified by numerical data from the survey.

3.4 Research strategy

The quantitative research will be adopted as the research strategy for the proposed study. Since the research will be based on the numerical data gathered among international student employees working in the UK fashion firms. It will also support the levels of satisfaction, training assistance,

pay equity, and loyalty among the participants. In this case, statistical analysis will be facilitated by the SPSS software to determine correlations between the management practices and the retention outcomes.

3.5 Data collection method

The primary data collection will be selected for the study, where the online survey will be conducted. This will be effective in capturing the recent trends of the students from different nationalities, who have their own working hours. To facilitate quantifying the levels of satisfaction and retention intentions, the survey questionnaire will be made up of closed-ended questions in the form of a Likert scale (for example, from strongly agree to strongly disagree). The survey will be distributed in the student groups, LinkedIn, and fashion work networks.

3.6 Sample size and sampling technique

The sampling technique chosen for the study is a non-probability purposive method, which means the participants will be selected from international students and currently working in fashion organisations in the UK. The method will be suitable since the study will target a specific working population. The sample will consist of 70-80 respondents, based on which the data will be statistically analysed within the selected timeframe.

3.7 Data analysis

The collected primary data will be analysed using statistical analysis with the help of SPSS. Responses of the participants will be summarised using descriptive statistics (mean, frequency, and percentages). The correlation between the strategies of talent management (training, support, and recognition) and employee retention intentions will be further tested using Pearson correlation analysis, where SPSS will ensure the systematic, reliable analysis for developing the research findings.

3.8 Ethical considerations

The research will be conducted by following ethical research standards. Voluntary consent will be obtained by informing the participants about the purpose of the study. Their information will be anonymous and confidential. The study will also be within the Data Protection Act 2018 to make

sure that personal information is not abused or distributed. The participants will also be allowed to withdraw their responses from the study at any time without consequences.

4.0 Expected findings

The expected results of this study indicate that concepts such as innovative management, transparent pay to the employees, and skill development are important to the international student employees in the UK fashion industry, which are the determinants of whether to stay in an organisation (Zakariya Chabani, Soumaya Askri, and Qian Long Kweh, 2025). Muleya et al. (2022) argue that employees tend to remain in workplaces where they get organised training and a career development path. Hence, it could be assumed that fashion companies that provide frequent training, mentoring, and open performance appraisals will demonstrate better retention results.

The findings could show that visa support and employment security are significant in retaining international students. According to Ahmed and Davies (2025), visa policy modifications in the UK influence the stability and the long-term employment strategies among the international workers. Therefore, fashion organisations can increase employee loyalty and reduce staff turnover by providing sponsorship advice and flexible working conditions. Moreover, the study will indicate that engagement and productivity increase when social inclusion and workplace belonging are applied. Al-Ansi et al. (2023) mentioned that the positive team culture and encouragement by managers have a significant relationship with the extent of job satisfaction.

5.0 Limitations

There are certain limitations associated with this methodology. Although online surveys will be employed in the study, the response rate can be less than expected. Not all the participants will respond to the questions correctly and completely. It will also not test the possibility of generalising results to all UK fashion company international students since non-probability sampling will be used. Besides that, there is information about employee retention in the UK fashion sector, but less information about how the students (who are doing part-time jobs in the UK fashion sector)

However, the adopted methodological approaches will still provide valuable information that can be relevant to the real work experiences.

6.0 Timeframe

The study started on 3rd November 2025 and will be completed on 7th February 2026.

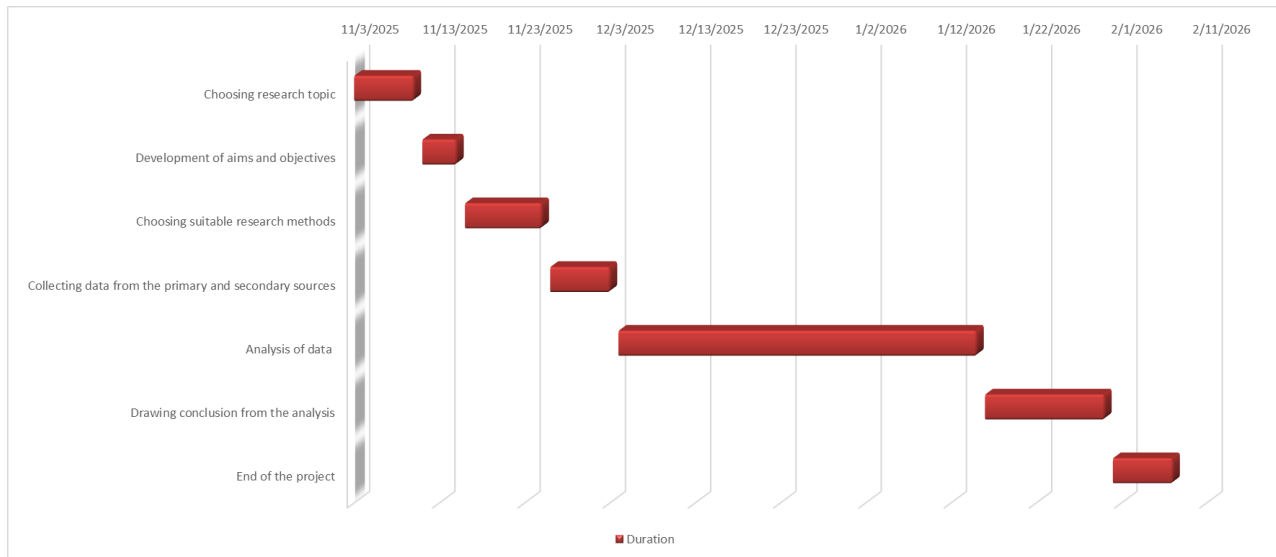


Figure 1: Time horizon

(Source: Self-created)

7.0 Conclusion

This study concludes that talent management and retention practices are needed to facilitate the international students serving in the UK fashion industry. The research has indicated that encouraging management, better remuneration, training, career growth, and visa advice are significant factors that enhance job satisfaction and loyalty. For this, international students have a higher chance of remaining and performing well when UK fashion companies provide them with an inclusive and supportive working environment.

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