



Remuneration Policy and Intention to Leave Among Teachers in the Private Higher Education Sector in Cameroon

MATIEDEM TIEFANG Huguette Silamine

University of Dschang. orcid.org/0000-0002-4901-8725

ABSTRACT: In a context of increased liberalization of the sector and saturation of public universities, the quality of private higher education largely depends on the stability and commitment of the teaching staff. Yet this staff faces structural salary insecurity. Hence the question of how the absence of a policy clearDoes remuneration influence interest ? Note to start from teachers in private higher educationin Cameroon ? The objective of this study is therefore clearly toThis study analyzes the impact of compensation policy structuring on the retention of teaching staff in private higher education institutions (IPES) in Cameroon. The initial hypothesis, inspired by Neveu's multidimensional model (1993-1996), is that the absence of a clear and equitable compensation policy acts as a demotivating factor, significantly increasing the intention to leave the institution among private higher education teachers in Cameroon. Adopting an interpretive and phenomenological qualitative approach, the research is based on 16 semi-structured interviews and two focus groups (n = 28 teachers) conducted in Yaoundé, Douala, and Bafoussam between January and February 2026. The inductive thematic analysis, assisted by NVivo, reveals a near-unanimous perception of opacity and arbitrariness in compensation management: the absence of a known salary scale, objective criteria (seniority, qualifications, performance), and an applicable collective bargaining agreement. This situation generates a chronic feeling of distributive injustice, erodes organizational commitment, and leads to marked demotivation (reduced teaching effort, loss of professional meaning). The study concludes that without urgent reform (publication of objective evaluation grids, targeted bonuses, regulatory framework by the Ministry of Higher Education, and revision of Law No. 2004/022), private higher education institutions risk a continuous decline in educational quality.

KEYWORDS: Remuneration policy, Intention to leave, Teacher, IPES, Cameroon.

Cite the Article: MATIEDEM TIEFANG, H.S. (2026). Remuneration Policy and Intention to Leave Among Teachers in the Private Higher Education Sector in Cameroon. *Contemporary Research Analysis Journal*, 3(3), 175-183. <https://doi.org/10.55677/CRAJ/07-2026-Vol03103>

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Publication Date: March 11, 2026

**Corresponding Author:* MATIEDEM TIEFANG Huguette Silamine

1. INTRODUCTION

The issue of teacher compensation in the private sector is a highly sensitive political matter in Cameroon. The country has witnessed intense union demands. The "Indignants 1" (2017) and "Indignants 2" (2018) protests demanded the swift resolution of their integration cases. Another example is the "We've Had Enough" movement (2022). These movements are merely symptoms of a cancer that is eating away at the entire private education sector. It is in an attempt to resolve this crisis that the Minister of Labor and Social Security initiated consultations on September 2nd and 3rd, 2025. Around the table with the Minister were the national secretaries of private education, union representatives from the sector, founders of private educational institutions, and the Collective of Teachers' Organizations. The results of these discussions were far from encouraging. Speaking to the national press, Roland Assoah, Secretary General of the Collective of Teachers' Organizations of Cameroon, denounced the obstacles put in place by employers and the resulting revolt: "Work on the National Collective Agreement on private education in Cameroon is progressing slowly, but we have a fundamental obstacle on the part of employers who so far refuse to offer us a salary scale (...) and this makes us even more revolted."¹.

This news must be understood within the context of a profound transformation in Cameroon's higher education landscape over the past two decades, marked by increasing liberalization and the massive emergence of Private Higher Education Institutions (PHEIs). This expansion responds to a growing social demand for education, which has overwhelmed public institutions (Ngono, 2021). In

¹Quotes collected and published by actu24-info <https://www.actu24.info/cameroon-revalorisation-salariale-des-enseignants-du-prive-les-negociations-pietinent/> Accessed on February 10, 2026

Remuneration Policy and Intention to Leave Among Teachers in the Private Higher Education Sector in Cameroon

this highly competitive educational market, the quality of teaching intrinsically depends on the competence and commitment of human capital. However, the sustainability of these institutions is now threatened by a worrying phenomenon: the instability of the teaching staff. Unlike in the public sector, where teachers benefit from civil servant status and job security, private sector teachers often operate under precarious contracts. Academic literature emphasizes that compensation policy, encompassing not only base salary but also bonuses, benefits, and payment regularity, is the primary driver of motivation or, conversely, frustration (Tchakonté, 2022). It is defined as the set of principles and actions that define, distribute, and manage the compensation and benefits of an organization's employees (Abossolo et al., 2024). It is sometimes the source of unease and a desire for change among teachers.

The intention to leave among these teachers is not simply a desire for change. It often reflects a breakdown in the psychological contract between employee and employer. In Cameroon, the situation of Cameroonian teachers has changed considerably depending on the circumstances. This evolution shows that it has gone from bad to worse (Ngo Djon, 2024). Indeed, salary disparities between the private and public sectors are real. Law No. 004/022 of July 22, 2004, which establishes the rules relating to the organization and operation of private education in Cameroon, stipulates that teachers are entitled to a regular salary, social security coverage, and continuing professional development, etc. Private education, across all levels, is governed by a salary scale dating back to 1985. The problem lies not only in its non-application but, more importantly, in its obsolescence. Indeed, this pay scale sets the lowest salary at 23,000 CFA francs (35.38 euros) and the highest at 143,000 CFA francs (220 euros). Furthermore, it does not include other compensation benefits such as performance bonuses, risk allowances, technical skills bonuses, health insurance, housing allowances, documentation allowances, and research allowances. Yet, the guaranteed minimum interprofessional wage (SMIG) in Cameroon is 43,969 CFA francs (67 euros).²The basic salaries of a university professor range from 300,000 FCFA to 800,000 FCFA.³

These disparities, coupled with the frequent lack of adequate social protections, push many university staff towards emigration (brain drain) or exhausting multi-jobs, to the detriment of student supervision. Since teachers are recognized as guarantors of the quality of education and key players in academic success (Best et al., 2020; UNESCO, 2021; Desmarais et al., 2022), it becomes crucial to examine the relationship between the compensation mechanisms implemented by the promoters of private higher education institutions (IPES) and teachers' willingness to commit to their mission in the long term. Understanding how the compensation structure influences talent retention is a strategic issue for ensuring the quality of education in Cameroon. Therefore, this study poses the following main question: how does the absence of a clear and equitable compensation policy influence the intention to leave among teachers in private higher education in Cameroon? The objective of this study is therefore clearly to analyze the impact of compensation policy structuring on the retention of teaching staff in private higher education institutions (IPES) in Cameroon. The initial hypothesis is that the absence of a clear and equitable compensation policy acts as a demotivating factor, significantly increasing the intention of private higher education teachers in Cameroon to leave the institution. The analysis is then built upon a theoretical and methodological framework, followed by a discussion of the results, which lead to potential solutions.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

a. Conceptual framework and literature review

Numerous studies have examined employee intention to leave (Tett and Meyer, 1993; Dalton et al., 1999; Zimmerman and Darnold, 2009; Cho et al., 2009; Regts and Molleman, 2012; Kumar and Govindarajo, 2014; Joo, Hahn, and Peterson, 2015). For these authors, this concept corresponds to a conscious and deliberate desire to leave the organization in the near future. While Mobley (1977, 1982) emphasizes that with intention to leave, the employee wants to leave the organization before terminating their employment, Price (1977), Neveu (1994), and Colle (2006) stress the very nature of this intention: a unilateral break with belonging to a social system. Other studies indicate that the intention to leave is detrimental to organizational effectiveness (Ahmad, Shahid, Huma, and Haider, 2012; Khan, 2013; Griffeth et al., 2000). In any case, this desire to leave one's job is now addressed using terms such as "disengagement," "voluntary resignation," "rolling," "attrition," "voluntary departure," or "turnover" (Elhmaidi and Tijani, 2024).

The issue of teacher mobility has generated a wealth of literature in economics and education since the 1970s (Charters, 1970; Greenberg & McCall, 1974; Mark & Anderson, 1978). Lothaire et al. (2020) dedicate an entire monograph to these studies. They conclude, as does Timsina (2024), that this phenomenon remains highly complex to study. Sub-Saharan Africa is one of the regions most affected by the brain drain of academics (World Bank, 2021). The migration of teachers from Sub-Saharan Africa, particularly the "best and most experienced," to Europe and North America, deserves to be considered a major public policy "crisis" (Moon, 2007). In Cameroon, very few studies truly and specifically address the issue of teacher attrition within this socio-professional category, despite a wealth of scientific research on teachers' working conditions in general and on their remuneration in particular. In this specific area, the study by Djeumeni-Tchamabe et al. (2024) stands out. The authors conducted a survey in six regions (Centre, Littoral, Northwest, Far North, East, and West) with 1,028 public primary school teachers and 195 stakeholders

²Refers to decree no. 2024/0168/pm of February 23, 2024, setting the minimum wage for state employees subject to the labor code.

³Refers to decree no. 2000/049 of 15 March 2000 establishing the salary scale for the higher education teaching staff

Remuneration Policy and Intention to Leave Among Teachers in the Private Higher Education Sector in Cameroon

(MINEDUB officials, school principals, trainers, inspectors, union representatives, parents, and students). The results of this study show that negative perceptions of remuneration, delays or lack of promotions, and irregular salaries are the main factors contributing to teacher attrition.

Another study by Asse, Fouda Ongodo, and Teupet (2025), this time focusing on private secondary education, targeted 90 teachers in the city of Douala. Tests conducted using factor analysis and structural equation modeling revealed (among other findings) that a sound compensation policy promotes the well-being of these teachers and retains them in educational institutions. This optimistic view is not shared by Anyia Enyegue. In his work, he concludes that in Cameroon, "substitute teachers have no status and also live in deplorable conditions" (Anyia Enyegue, 2022). Regarding private secondary schools (IPES), Ndedi, Kuete, and Kouwos (2015) conducted an empirical study of a sample of 30 IPES across Cameroon. The study results show that most private higher education institutions (92 percent) lack dedicated research professors who can motivate students to engage in scientific research. Also associated with scientific research, private institutions lack the infrastructure necessary for it.

This study examines the link between intention to leave and compensation policy. Similar studies exist, notably those focusing on intangible compensation (Côté and Renaud, 2022), its effects on brain drain among teachers in sub-Saharan Africa (Traore, 2025), or analyzing the phenomenon in a post-COVID context (Pandya, et al., 2022) or in religious education (Watchueng et al., 2026). The experience of some African countries shows that the implementation of differentiated salary policies (research bonuses, variable remuneration by discipline) can help reduce brain drain (Teferra, 2021). This theoretical and empirical literature indicates that the case of private higher education teachers in Cameroon remains untouched.

b. Theoretical Model of Analysis

Several theoretical models on employee turnover intention have been studied in recent years. These include the models of March and Simon (1958), Price (1977), Mobley (1977), Mobley et al. (1979), Steers and Mowday (1981), Sheridan and Abelson (1983), McFarlane-Shore et al. (1990), and Neveu (1993, 1994, 1996). It is the model of this latter author that interests us in the context of this study. Indeed, the other models focus on the cognitive, affective, and relational factors and dynamics that affect the decision to leave. Neveu (1993, 1994, 1996), on the other hand, has the merit of not only specifically addressing "the intention phase" but, above all, considers that it should be read from a multidimensional approach. He conceives voluntary departure as a rational and sequential process, where the intention to leave acts as a central mediator between work attitudes and the actual behavior of resignation.

Unlike economic models (based solely on cost-benefit calculations), this framework integrates organizational mechanisms of job satisfaction. These elements are five in number: instrumental communication, opportunity for advancement, integration, participation, and remuneration.

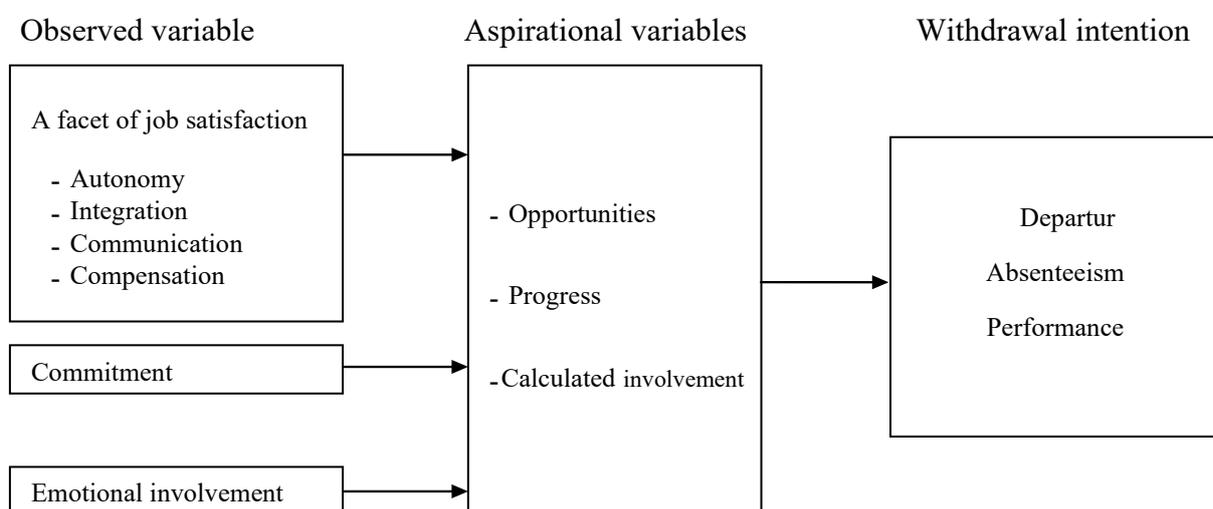


Figure 1 : Alternative Model of Departure Intention by Jean-Pierre Neveu

Source : Neveu, 1994, p.35

This model is particularly relevant for analyzing contexts where organizational factors, such as compensation, influence employee loyalty. It was initially applied to corporate executives in France, but its principles can be generalized to other sectors, including higher education. Applied to teachers in Cameroonian private higher education institutions, the model allows for an analysis of how salary uncertainty (lack of a clear policy) reduces satisfaction and engagement, encouraging the search for alternatives. Within a local context of precarious employment (irregular salaries in the private sector), it frames the empirical study through measures of intention to leave, adaptable to teaching staff. The model predicts that without increased engagement (through clear policies), turnover accelerates.

3. METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

This study adopts a primarily qualitative approach. It is well-suited to exploring in depth the perceptions, experiences, and motivations of teachers regarding the impact of the lack of a clear compensation policy on their intention to leave their institution. The chosen paradigm is interpretive, aiming to understand the subjective meanings that participants attribute to their professional context. This qualitative approach allows for the capture of contextual nuances specific to the private higher education sector in Cameroon. Here, salary dynamics are often informal and influenced by local socio-economic factors.

This study adopts a phenomenological approach, focusing on teachers' lived experiences in the face of the lack of a structured compensation policy. This approach allows us to explore how this absence influences the intention to leave the profession, particularly by emphasizing participants' personal narratives and interpretations. The research is exploratory, with an inductive phase to generate insights from empirical data. These elements allow us to test the initial hypothesis that the absence of a clear and equitable policy increases demotivation and the intention to leave. The study was conducted in a single phase. The fieldwork, carried out between January and February 2026, combined data collection and iterative analysis to achieve data saturation.

Three cities served as the study sites: Yaoundé, Bafoussam, and Douala. The target population comprised teachers in higher education institutions (IPES) in Cameroon, working in institutions recognized by the Ministry of Higher Education (MINESUP). To ensure qualitative representativeness, the sampling was selective and stratified. It took into account criteria such as seniority and professional status. Thus, tenured teachers working in IPES were excluded, as were temporary teachers with less than three years of experience. The snowball sampling technique allowed us to reach a sample size of 28 people. It was at this size that saturation was reached.

Data was collected primarily through 16 semi-structured individual interviews and two focus groups of six people each. Data collection took place both in person and via two videoconferences to accommodate geographical constraints in Cameroon. The average interview duration was 45 minutes. Topics covered included perceptions of compensation policy, factors contributing to demotivation, and the intention to leave. The interview guide was pre-tested with three colleagues. The final version included open-ended questions such as: "How would you describe your current compensation structure?"; "How does the lack of a clear policy affect your motivation at work?"; and "What factors would lead you to leave your institution?" To ensure credibility, member-checking was performed. Participants validated the summaries of their interviews. Most interviews were recorded with consent. They were then transcribed verbatim and anonymized. The analysis of the data was thematic and inductive (Braun and Clarke, 2006), utilizing NVivo software. The main limitations of this methodological approach lie in the use of a non-probability sample and the subjectivity inherent in qualitative and reflective analysis. This did not, however, diminish the relevance of our results.

4. STUDY RESULTS

4.1. There is an almost unanimous perception of the absence of a clear, structured and transparent remuneration policy in private higher education institutions (IPES) in Cameroon.

The inductive thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews (n=16), focus groups (n=12), and secondary documents (standard contracts, internal IPES reports) reveals the complete or near-complete absence of a formalized, written, and transparent compensation policy within private higher education institutions (IPES). The extremely prevalent and convergent perception among the interviewed teachers indicates that this is the dominant norm in Cameroon. More than 85% of the coded semantic units related to compensation (out of an initial total of 412 codes for this theme) describe a salary system characterized by individual or discretionary negotiation of emoluments. Generally, what dominates and influences the negotiation is the personal relationship with the management or the founder of the institution. Furthermore, there is clearly no collective bargaining agreement, let alone a salary scale known and accessible to all teaching staff in private higher education.

The teachers interviewed also believe that the lack of a clear compensation policy is manifested in the absence of objective and publicly available criteria for setting or revising salaries (such as seniority, academic rank, actual teaching hours, doctoral qualifications, teaching performance, or research). The most recurring terms in the verbatim transcripts include: "total vagueness," "pure arbitrariness," "complete opacity," "salary cronyism," "favoritism," and "blatant injustice." This opacity is perceived as structural rather than circumstantial. It is therefore linked to the dominant managerial governance in private higher education institutions (IPES). This governance is centered on the founder or an informal family council. Consequently, compensation approaches are based on a private logic rather than an institutionalized HR logic. In short, the absence of a clear and equitable compensation policy appears to be a systemic phenomenon in the Cameroonian private higher education sector. It forms the basis on which the other factors of demobilization and intention to leave identified in the subsequent results are built.

4.2. The effects of the absence of a clear remuneration policy on the demotivation of teachers in private higher education institutions

The analyzed data shows that the absence of a clear, transparent and fair remuneration policy. The opacity and arbitrariness of salary policy emerge as the most pervasive and saturated factor in demotivation among teachers in Cameroon's private higher education institutions (IPES). This opacity and arbitrariness are not limited to occasional dissatisfaction; they act as a systemic factor in chronic demotivation, eroding professional commitment and transforming teaching into a struggle for survival rather than

Remuneration Policy and Intention to Leave Among Teachers in the Private Higher Education Sector in Cameroon

a vocation. Among the teachers interviewed, this theme dominated the discourse, representing approximately 68% of the priority criteria related to motivation and commitment. However, other factors were also mentioned: workload, material conditions, organizational climate, and lack of career prospects. There is clearly a strong link between the opacity surrounding salary policy and work motivation. This demotivation manifests itself through several recurring behavioral and attitudinal dimensions.

First, a voluntary reduction in teaching effort. The teachers interviewed reported limiting their involvement to the bare minimum. This translates into less thorough course preparation, reduced availability for students outside of mandatory class hours, and less involvement in extracurricular or institutional activities (supervising dissertations, participating in internal seminars, research initiatives). Second, a decrease in organizational commitment. This was reflected in expressions such as: "What's the point of striving hard if there's no financial recognition?", "We feel exploited and interchangeable," "We work for the sponsor and their family." Finally, a loss of professional meaning. Indeed, several teachers, particularly those with a doctorate or in the process of obtaining one, expressed a strong cognitive dissonance between their high qualifications and the perception of "unworthy" or "poverty-sized" compensation, leading to an erosion of professional pride and a devaluation of their role.

4.3. Elements of a strong intention to leave and actual turnover observed among teachers in private higher education institutions in Cameroon

Thematic inductive analysis reveals a highly prevalent intention to leave among the teachers interviewed for this study. Across all participants, 87% expressed an intention to leave their current institution within 12 to 24 months, with the level of intention described as "high" or "very high" (a subjective scale reported by the participants themselves during the interviews). This figure, while descriptive and not probabilistic, reflects a remarkable convergence of discourse and a rapid saturation of the topic by the twentieth interview. This intention translates concretely into active plans for professional mobility. For example, some spoke of joining other private higher education institutions (IPES), particularly those considered (based on rumors and informal networks) to be more structured or better paid. Others aspire to join the civil service. These latter are motivated by the prospect of a known, fixed, and more attractive salary structure. Others, fewer in number, are considering career paths in the non-educational private sector, self-employment, and venturing out to horizons beyond national borders.

Also of interest, the verbatim comments reveal an already high turnover rate in the sector. Indeed, several participants (especially those with 5 to 10 years of experience) left at least one private higher education institution (IPES) in the last five years for the same reasons (lack of salary transparency, perceived unfairness, lack of recognition). "I've already changed IPES twice in four years. Each time, it's the same story: a promised pay raise that never materializes. Next time, it'll be the public sector or abroad." These repeated moves reinforce a vicious cycle: the most qualified and experienced teachers leave first, making room for the recruitment of temporary staff or less stable profiles, which further degrades the perceived quality and exacerbates the brain drain of remaining talent. In short, the high intention to leave and the observed turnover constitute a structural phenomenon in Cameroonian IPES, fueled by the absence of a clear compensation policy.

5. DISCUSSION OF RESULTS AND SUGGESTIONS

To the question of how the absence of a policy of clear remuneration influences interest in starting from teachers in private higher education in Cameroon, the present study answers that the absence of a clear, transparent, and equitable compensation policy is a major and systemic factor contributing to the intention to leave. It acts as a powerful demotivator, amplifying feelings of injustice and fostering high professional mobility. Participants agree that without structural reform of salary management (a known pay scale, objective criteria, and periodic salary increases), the private higher education sector risks a continuous brain drain, with negative repercussions on the overall quality of private higher education in Cameroon. These findings are discussed.

Indeed, in a cross-sectional study on teacher retention and satisfaction in Ethiopia and Malawi, Osei and Mensah (2024) show that the lack of transparent salary structures, often linked to informal school governance, amplifies perceptions of inequity, particularly among qualified teachers, leading to early demotivation. Similarly, Kafumbu (2019), in a quantitative assessment in Malawi, demonstrates that extrinsic factors such as irregular salaries and the absence of known salary scales are the main predictors of low job satisfaction, explaining up to 40% of the variance in turnover intentions among secondary school teachers. This is also the case in peri-urban private schools in Ghana, where individual negotiations increase the risk of turnover (Wolf et al., 2025). These findings corroborate our result and support Jean-Pierre Neveu's model.

According to Neveu's model (1996), salary opacity acts as a triggering organizational factor, influencing the cognitive variables of the turnover process. Indeed, Neveu groups perceptions of HR practices (such as salary transparency) among the contextual variables that modulate individual aspirations and cognitive evaluations of alternatives. In our study, the absence of a known salary scale and objective criteria (seniority, qualifications) reinforces cognitive dissonance among teachers, particularly those with doctorates, who perceive an imbalance between their inputs (effort, degrees) and outputs (compensation). This lack of salary structure generates a strong sense of distributive injustice (Adams, 1965) and perceived inequity (Colquitt, 2001).

However, for several authors, reducing employee turnover in the private sector (Bangsu et al., 2023), particularly among teachers (Aulia and Haerani, 2022), requires more than just a good compensation policy. It also necessitates considering benefits, a positive organizational climate, the fulfillment of personal needs, and even continuing professional development. To reverse this

Remuneration Policy and Intention to Leave Among Teachers in the Private Higher Education Sector in Cameroon

structural trend and retain teaching talent, concerted and rapid action is essential. The administrations of higher education institutions must publish and implement a written salary scale based on objective criteria (grade, seniority, teaching load, doctoral qualifications, performance), with annual revisions indexed to inflation, while also introducing targeted bonuses (research, supervision, results) and tangible benefits (health, transportation, leave).

In parallel, the Ministry of Higher Education (MINESUP), in partnership with private higher education institutions (IPES) associations, should adopt a minimum framework imposing standards of transparency and pay equity in private higher education, create a staff turnover observatory based on anonymous annual surveys, and develop subsidized continuing education programs to enhance the sector's attractiveness. At the national level, a revision of Law No. 2004/022 is necessary to impose minimum standards for remuneration and social protection, coupled with tax incentives and subsidies contingent on the adoption of equitable HR policies. Furthermore, partnerships with UNESCO, the World Bank, and the diaspora could finance pilot reform projects. Without these urgent measures, private higher education institutions risk continuing to lose their best teachers to the public sector, non-educational private institutions, or emigration, to the detriment of the overall quality of private higher education in Cameroon. A coordinated implementation of these recommendations, aligned with ILO/UNESCO standards and African education strategies, can reverse the trend.

6. CONCLUSION

This study sought to analyze the impact of the absence of a clear, transparent, and equitable remuneration policy on the intention to leave private higher education teachers in Cameroon. The results, obtained through an interpretive qualitative approach combining semi-structured interviews and focus groups with 28 teachers working in Private Higher Education Institutions (IPES) in Yaoundé, Douala, and Bafoussam, converge on an unambiguous diagnosis: the opacity and arbitrariness characterizing salary management constitute a systemic and predominant factor in professional demotivation and the intention to leave.

Thematic inductive analysis revealed that, in the vast majority of cases, the absence of a known salary scale, objective criteria for setting and revising salaries, and the lack of an applicable collective bargaining agreement generate a chronic feeling of distributive injustice and perceived inequity. These perceptions profoundly erode organizational commitment and emotional involvement, transform teaching into a survival activity rather than a vocation, and lead to a voluntary reduction in teaching effort. As a logical consequence, nearly nine out of ten teachers surveyed expressed a high intention to leave in the medium term (12–24 months), while the already observed turnover fuels a vicious cycle of losing the most qualified and experienced professionals.

These empirical findings strongly align with Neveu's multidimensional model (1993, 1994, 1996), which positions remuneration among the central organizational determinants of job satisfaction and withdrawal intention. They also resonate with recent work conducted in sub-Saharan Africa (Osei & Mensah, 2024; Kafumbu, 2019; Wolf et al., 2025) that highlights the amplifying role of informal governance and discretionary negotiations in the generation of teacher turnover. Beyond confirming the initial hypothesis, this research underscores a major strategic challenge for the sustainability and quality of Cameroonian private higher education: without structural reform of remuneration management, private higher education institutions risk continuing to suffer an accelerated brain drain of teaching talent, to the benefit of the public sector, the non-educational private sector, or expatriation. This dynamic directly threatens the sector's ability to meet the growing demand for quality training in a context of liberalization and increased competition. The proposed courses of action (publication and application of objective salary scales, introduction of targeted bonuses, strengthening of social benefits, regulatory framework by the Ministry of Higher Education, and revision of Law No. 2004/022) constitute realistic and complementary levers. Their implementation, however, will require concerted political will from public authorities, private higher education institutions, and professional organizations.

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Remuneration Policy and Intention to Leave Among Teachers in the Private Higher Education Sector in Cameroon

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