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Why do we stay? Factors influencing faculty retention in a Brazilian private medical school: a mixed- methods study

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Abstract

Background

Brazil's rapid expansion of private medical schools has created tensions between growth and quality. Recent national examination results revealed that 30.5% of medical courses received insufficient ratings, placing institutions under regulatory pressure. Faculty retention is critical for institutional quality. While international literature suggests intrinsic factors outweigh salary in retention decisions, how these dynamics operate in rapidly expanding private medical schools in middle-income countries remains underexplored. This study investigated factors influencing faculty retention at a Brazilian private medical school, aiming to assess retention intentions, identify motivational factors, and explore sources of job satisfaction and dissatisfaction.

Methods

This mixed-methods cross-sectional study surveyed 206 faculty members at a private medical school during August 2024 and February 2025. Data collection involved a self-administered electronic questionnaire with multiple-choice and open-ended questions. Quantitative data were analyzed using Mann-Whitney and Fisher's exact tests. Qualitative responses underwent thematic content analysis with iterative double-coding, achieving 88–95% inter-coder agreement.

Results

High retention intention was reported (82% intend to stay, 16.5% uncertain), despite substantial criticism of working conditions. No demographic or professional differences distinguished committed from uncertain faculty. For 91.3%, teaching was not their primary professional activity; 56.3% earned less than one-quarter of income from teaching. The predominant retention factor was "satisfaction and fulfillment with teaching" (43.1%). Student relationships were the primary satisfaction source (59.3%) but also a demand (14.6% dissatisfaction). Main dissatisfaction sources were remuneration (27.1%), organizational problems (21.4%), and workload (16.1%). Notably, 60.7% desired greater institutional involvement, particularly in research (24.3%) and teaching planning (20.9%).

Conclusions

Faculty demonstrate strong retention driven by intrinsic motivation despite low salaries and organizational challenges. This reflects a professional profile where teaching is secondary employment, enabling vocational choice over financial necessity. However, this configuration may limit pedagogical engagement and quality improvement. Institutions must simultaneously leverage existing intrinsic motivation while addressing extrinsic concerns and creating structured pathways for those desiring

greater involvement. These findings have particular relevance for medical schools in middle-income countries navigating expansion alongside quality improvement demands.

Background

The rapid expansion of medical schools in Brazil, particularly in the private sector and driven by policies such as the More Doctors (“Mais Médicos”) Program [1], has created an imbalance between quantitative growth and academic quality. This gap, evidenced by declining national performance indicators, was recently confirmed by the first National Medical Education Assessment Examination (ENAMED) results (January 2026): In 30.5% of evaluated courses (107 of 351), an inadequate proportion of graduating students achieved proficiency, resulting in insufficient institutional ratings [2]. This scenario places institutions, especially for-profit private ones, under growing regulatory pressure to ensure training excellence [1, 3]. An institution's ability to retain stable and qualified faculty emerges as a strategic differentiator directly linked to academic performance and regulatory survival [4].

Despite the recognized importance of teaching quality, medical faculty in Brazil face a historical gap in pedagogical preparation. While for selection processes and career progression academic degrees and scientific production are strongly considered, pedagogical skills remain undervalued [5]. National data confirms this paradox: while 51% of medical faculty held master's or doctoral degrees, only 7% had specialization in education [5]. Although more recent studies report that 41–64% of faculty have participated in some pedagogical training activities [6, 7], this does not necessarily indicate systematic pedagogical preparation, and the fundamental gap in formal educational training persists [8, 9]. Recent National Curriculum Guidelines have mandated faculty development programs [10], but translating policy into genuine faculty engagement remains challenging.

This engagement challenge relates partly to faculty identity formation. In the absence of structured pedagogical training, medical teachers' professional identity develops informally, often with clinical or research roles overriding teaching [11, 12]. Faculty identity is not merely abstract—it correlates with professional satisfaction [13, 14], sense of belonging [15], teaching effectiveness [16], and engagement with development activities [12]. The Job Demands-Resources model suggests that job resources (autonomy, support, development opportunities) foster engagement, while excessive demands lead to burnout [16, 17]. In academic medicine, faculty navigate multiple competing demands with often limited support [4].

Faculty retention is critical for institutional quality and curricular continuity [18, 19]. International literature suggests that intrinsic factors (teaching satisfaction, student relationships, sense of purpose) outweigh salary in retention decisions [20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26], most research originates from high-income countries with well-structured and established systems. How these dynamics operate in rapidly expanding private medical schools in middle-income countries under regulatory pressure remain underexplored.

This study addresses this knowledge gap by investigating faculty retention in a Brazilian private medical school located in a major urban center. We aimed to: (1) assess faculty intention to remain at the institution over the next five years; (2) identify the motivational factors influencing decisions to stay or consider leaving; and (3) explore sources of job satisfaction and dissatisfaction among medical faculty. Using a mixed-methods approach, we provide insights for institutions navigating expansion and quality improvement in Brazilian medical education.

Methods

Ethical Considerations

This study was conducted in accordance with the principles of the Declaration of Helsinki and was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of Estácio de Sá University (CEP/UNESA) on June 11, 2024, under opinion number 6.880.799 (CAAE 79130724.0.0000.5284). The research followed all ethical precepts established by Resolution No. 466/2012 of the National Health Council. Participation was voluntary, preceded by free and informed consent, and participant anonymity was guaranteed by not collecting identifying data in the electronic form.

Study Design

Mixed-methods cross-sectional study.

Population and Sample

All faculty members and internship preceptors at the Vista Carioca Campus of the Institute of Medical Education (IDOMED) were invited to participate in the study. Participation was voluntary. Sample size was estimated based on confidence interval calculation for proportions, adopting a sampling error of 5% and a confidence level of 90%. Conservatively, a population proportion of 50% was considered to maximize sample size in the absence of prior estimates. Initially, sample size was calculated for an infinite population using a critical Z value of 1.645, resulting in $n_0 \approx 271$ participants. Subsequently, finite population correction was applied considering the institution's faculty universe. With a population of 400 faculty members, the estimated minimum sample size was 162 participants. The number of responses obtained exceeded the estimated minimum sample size, and all valid responses were included in the analyses.

Data Collection Instrument

The data collection instrument consisted of a self-administered electronic questionnaire developed specifically for this study on Google Forms, containing 17 multiple-choice questions and 10 simple open-ended questions, divided into five sections: (1) Aspirations, (2) Teaching Identity, (3) Academic Training,

(4) Professional Practice, and (5) Demographic Data. The questionnaire collected demographic and professional characteristics including age, sex, academic training level, years at the institution, workload distribution, and proportion of income derived from teaching (see Supplementary File 1 for complete questionnaire).

Upon accessing the link, participants were presented with the Free and Informed Consent Form, and only upon accepting participation were they directed to the first section of the questionnaire.

Data Collection Procedures

Data collection occurred during two periods: at the beginning of the 2024.2 academic semester (August 2024) and at the beginning of the 2025.1 academic semester (February 2025). The research form was disseminated through messages sent weekly to faculty WhatsApp groups containing the survey link.

Data were extracted from the electronic form into an Excel spreadsheet. A copy was made and subsequently adjusted for import into SPSS statistical software for quantitative analyses. A second copy was made for qualitative data analysis, and the original file extracted from Google Forms was kept intact for later consultation if necessary.

Data Analysis

Quantitative Analysis

Numerical results were presented as percentages (n/total) or as median (p25-p75). Statistical analyses were performed using SPSS version 13.0 for Windows (SPSS, Inc., Chicago, IL). Numerical variables are presented as median (IQR). The non-parametric Mann-Whitney test was used to compare numerical and ordinal variables between groups. Fisher's exact test was used to assess associations between dichotomous variables. Chi-square test (or Fisher's exact test when expected cell counts were < 5) was used for categorical variables. A p-value less than 0.05 was considered statistically significant.

Qualitative Analysis

Three open-ended questions from the questionnaire were subjected to thematic content analysis for inclusion in this study. For the first two questions (work satisfaction and work dissatisfaction), specific categorization systems were developed through an inductive approach from the data, resulting in 8 and 9 categories, respectively. Categories were not mutually exclusive, allowing a single response to be coded into multiple categories when applicable.

The question about intention to remain at the institution over the next five years was analyzed in two stages. First, the frequency distribution of responses (Yes/No/Maybe) was calculated. The justifications from the YES group (n = 153) and MAYBE group (n = 31) were subjected to thematic content analysis

separately, as they reflect different decision dimensions: the YES group reveals retention factors, while the MAYBE group predominantly reveals conditions that, if met, could favor retention. For each group, specific categorization systems were developed through an inductive approach. The NO group (n = 3, 1.5%), due to its small sample size, had its justifications reported descriptively without formal categorization.

The coding process was performed iteratively with double-coding verification. The principal author (G.F.T.) conducted initial coding of all responses (total n: 570), which were subsequently reviewed by the artificial intelligence assistant Claude 3.5 Sonnet (Anthropic), acting as a second coder. The process involved: (a) sequential coding of batches of 10–20 responses by the author, (b) systematic review by the AI assistant with identification of inconsistencies and adjustment suggestions, (c) discussion of ambiguous cases and iterative refinement of category definitions, and (d) development of decision rules and keyword checklists to ensure consistency throughout the analysis.

Agreement between initial and adjusted coding ranged from 64–90% in the first batches, reflecting the natural process of learning and refining categories. After establishing clear definitions and decision rules, agreement stabilized at 88–95% for the different questions, demonstrating the adequacy of the developed categorization systems. The principal author (G.F.T.) maintained final decision-making authority over all categorizations, particularly drawing on specific knowledge as a faculty member working at the institution for resolution of ambiguous cases requiring contextual interpretation.

The developed categories, frequencies, and representative examples are presented in the Results section.

Results

Participant Characteristics

A total of 206 faculty members participated in the study. The median age was 49 (41–58) years, with 58.7% (n = 121) female. Regarding self-reported race/skin color, 83.9% (n = 172) identified as white/light-skinned and 14.1% (n = 29) as brown/dark/Black. Most faculty (75.4%; n = 153) reported having children.

The median time since graduation was 25 (15-33.5) years. Regarding academic training, 82% (n = 168) were physicians and 18% (n = 37) belonged to other professional categories. Concerning highest academic degree, 25.4% (n = 52) held specialization/residency, 43.9% (n = 90) master's degrees, 20.5% (n = 42) doctorates, and 9.8% (n = 20) post-doctoral degrees.

Regarding institutional tenure, 44.8% (n = 90) had worked at the institution for less than 5 years, 25.9% (n = 52) for 5–10 years, and 29.4% (n = 59) for more than 10 years. Nearly all faculty (91.3%; n = 188) had another professional activity besides teaching at the institution.

The cycle with the highest teaching load was the basic science cycle (periods 1–4) for 27.7% (n = 57) of respondents, the clinical cycle (periods 5–8) for 47.6% (n = 98), and the clerkship (periods 9–12) for 24.8% (n = 51). Regarding workload dedicated to the institution, 43.8% (n = 89) dedicated up to 25% of their work week, 29.6% (n = 60) between 25–50%, 16.7% (n = 34) between 50–75%, and 9.8% (n = 20) more than 75%. In contrast, for 56.3% (n = 116) of faculty, teaching income represented less than 25% of their total income; for 17% (n = 35) it represented 25–50%; for 11.7% (n = 24) it represented 50–75%; and for 13.6% (n = 28) it represented more than 75% of their total income.

Retention Intention and Institutional Engagement

The vast majority of faculty (94.7%; n = 195) reported feeling proud to work at the institution, and 60.7% (n = 125) expressed desire for greater institutional involvement: 10.2% (n = 21) in coordination support positions, 24.3% (n = 50) in research projects, 20.9% (n = 43) in teaching activity planning, and 5.3% (n = 11) in delivering theoretical classes (as they currently work exclusively in practical settings).

When asked "Do you see yourself working as a faculty member in the next 5 years?", only three faculty members (1.5%) responded they did not see themselves remaining in the next five years. Their reasons were: planned or imminent retirement (n = 2) and seeking opportunities at a federal university (n = 1). Thirty-one faculty members (16.5%) responded "maybe" and 153 (82%) responded "yes."

No statistically significant differences were found between faculty uncertain about retention and those committed to staying regarding age, time since graduation, institutional tenure, primary teaching cycle, highest academic degree, percentage of income derived from teaching, teaching workload proportion, self-reported race/ethnicity, gender, or parental status.

Factors Influencing Retention Decisions

Table 1 presents the thematic categories of justifications for uncertainty about remaining at the institution. Among the 31 faculty members uncertain about staying, salary and benefits concerns emerged as the most frequently mentioned factor (25.8%; n = 8), followed by lack of recognition and professional value (16.1%; n = 5) and opportunities at other institutions (16.1%; n = 5). Other concerns included upcoming retirement (12.9%; n = 4), institutional uncertainties (12.9%; n = 4), personal/family/health issues (9.7%; n = 3), and external/contextual factors (9.7%; n = 3). One faculty member (3.2%) expressed misalignment with institutional values or mission.

Table 2 presents the thematic categories of justifications for desiring to remain at the institution. Among the 153 faculty members who intended to stay, satisfaction and fulfillment with teaching emerged as the dominant factor (43.1%; n = 66), followed by satisfaction with the institution itself (23.5%; n = 36). Career plans and long-term goals related to teaching accounted for 17% (n = 26) of responses, while professional development and continuous learning represented 13.7% (n = 21). Other retention factors included sense of belonging or institutional identification (7.2%; n = 11), belief in education or sense of purpose/mission (7.8%; n = 12), relationship with students (7.2%; n = 11), and contribution and impact on training future physicians (7.2%; n = 11).

Job Satisfaction and Dissatisfaction

Responses to the open-ended question about work satisfaction were subjected to thematic content analysis, resulting in eight thematic categories. As shown in Table 3, the relationship with students and teaching was the most frequently cited source of satisfaction (59.3%; n = 115), followed by work environment and interpersonal relationships (31.4%; n = 61), and institutional quality and reputation (19.1%; n = 37). Infrastructure and institutional resources were mentioned by 12.9% (n = 25), professional development and continuous learning by 11.3% (n = 22), recognition and institutional valorization by 7.7% (n = 15), and pedagogical autonomy and freedom by 4.6% (n = 9).

Regarding work dissatisfaction (Table 4), among 192 responses, 20 faculty members (10.4%) explicitly stated they had no complaints or sources of dissatisfaction at work (notably, only 3 of these were clearly identified as recent hires). Among those reporting dissatisfaction, the most frequently mentioned concerns were remuneration and benefits (27.1%; n = 52), followed by organizational problems (21.4%; n = 41), workload and excessive demands (16.1%; n = 31), and problems with students (14.6%; n = 28). Infrastructure and resources were mentioned by 13.5% (n = 26), lack of recognition and valorization by 10.4% (n = 20), lack of autonomy and participation in decisions by 6.8% (n = 13), and interpersonal problems with colleagues by 5.7% (n = 11).

Table 1
Thematic categories of justifications for uncertainty about remaining at the institution

Thematic Category	Definition	% (n)*	Representative Examples
Salary and Benefits	Mentions of low salary, inadequate remuneration, poor financial return, lack of benefits	25,8 (8)	"Little recognition, absence of an effective career plan, low financial return" “I love what I do, but the salary is very low" “I enjoy teaching and interacting with students, but the low salary offered and the lack of expected benefits for an institution of this size that is publicly traded (e.g., adequate health plan, private pension, career plan, profit sharing, meal vouchers, childcare assistance...) are very discouraging. Today, if a better offer from another institution or a non-teaching position came along, I would strongly consider leaving the institution"
Lack of Recognition and Professional Valorization	Mentions of lack of recognition, not feeling valued or encouraged, absence of career plan, lack of institutional incentive for faculty.	16,1 (5)	"Little recognition, absence of an effective career plan, low financial return" "If I feel valued and encouraged, the possibility of continuing is real"
Institutional Uncertainties	Uncertainties about the institution's direction, institutional priorities, possible changes in institutional profile/policies, uncertainty about agreements or institutional partnerships.	12,9 (4)	"Because we don't know the university's priorities and the direction it will take" "5 years is a long time, the company's profile could change and I might not fit in, but keeping it as it is today, I do see myself staying"
Misalignment with Values or Institutional Mission	Perception of lack of space for free thinking/creativity, predominance of commercial interests over educational mission, lack of commitment to community/social justice	3,2 (1)	"Despite having a positive experience at the institution, I think there is little room for free thinking, creation and, above all, its commitment to the community is very fragile, just as there is no place for engagement in promoting social justice, a role that the university should play. As a teacher, I don't feel free and always seem haunted by commercial interests that override any other motivation"
Imminent or Likely Retirement	Mentions of being close to retirement, intention to retire within 5 years, planned career closure.	12,9 (4)	"I intend to end my career in a maximum of 5 years" "I'm close to retirement age"

*n = number of responses coded in each category; % calculated over the total of 31 responses. As multiple coding was allowed, the sum of frequencies exceeds 100%

Thematic Category	Definition	% (n)*	Representative Examples
Professional Opportunities at Other Institutions	Possibility of receiving better offers, evaluating other professional opportunities, dependence on future opportunities, possible career change	16,1 (5)	"I have no plans to leave, but other opportunities may arise" "Possibility of a better job offer"
Personal, Family, or Health Issues	Personal health issues, family matters, alignment with spouse, burnout/fatigue after many years, personal life issues	9,7 (3)	"I've been here for many years and I don't know if I'll continue to want to maintain teaching" "Depends on life issues and alignment with my wife"
External or Contextual Factors	Factors external to the institution and faculty, such as instability of the teaching profession, public policies, urban violence, sociopolitical context.	9,7 (3)	"I want to, but... there's the uncertainty of the instability of the teaching profession" "Instability of public policy"

*n = number of responses coded in each category; % calculated over the total of 31 responses. As multiple coding was allowed, the sum of frequencies exceeds 100%

Table 2
Thematic categories of justifications for desire to remain at the institution

Thematic Category	Definition	% (n)*	Representative Examples
Satisfaction and Fulfillment with Teaching	Expressions of pleasure, satisfaction, love, passion, fulfillment, or happiness with the teaching activity itself (teaching, giving classes, education, faculty work).	43,1 (66)	"I like being an educator, the exchange between teachers and between teachers and students" "I enjoy the work and find it very rewarding" "I have personal satisfaction and feel professionally fulfilled in teaching at the undergraduate level" "I love being a teacher and have been studying to meet the demands that arise each year!"
Satisfaction with the Institution	Positive expressions about the specific institution, including work environment, structure, organization, team, coordination, working conditions, institutional valorization, trust in the institution.	23,5 (36)	"I enjoy working here and have many plans for the coming years" "Excellent workplace: leadership and colleagues united and engaged in improving the teaching-learning relationship. I have support from everyone to do my work" "I see it as an excellent place for professional development and practice"
Relationship with Students	Mentions of interaction, contact, exchange, relationship or direct work with students as a reason for staying.	7,2 (11)	"I like being an educator, the exchange between teachers and between teachers and students" "Interaction with students is beneficial for both; it forces us to study more" "I love working with students and at this company where I was also a student"

* n = number of responses coded in each category; % calculated over the total of 153 responses. As multiple coding was allowed, the sum of frequencies exceeds 100%

Thematic Category	Definition	% (n)*	Representative Examples
Contribution and Impact on Training	Sense of contribution, participation, impact or role in training future professionals, making a difference, pride in training, transmitting knowledge/experiences.	7,2 (11)	"I'm proud to participate in the medical training of my students" "Yes, because I can contribute to the training and development of future professionals" "Because I feel happy to be able to participate in student training"
Professional Development and Continuous Learning	Mentions of own learning, updating, growth, professional development, or benefits of teaching for the faculty member's own development.	13,7 (21)	"I like being an educator, the exchange between teachers and between teachers and students" "I love being a teacher and have been studying to meet the demands that arise each year!" "Interaction with students is beneficial for both; it forces us to study more"
Life Project, Career, or Long-term Plans	Mentions of life project, career plan, personal goals related to teaching, intention to continue indefinitely or until retirement, teaching as main activity.	17 (26)	"I enjoy working here and have many plans for the coming years" "I like teaching and want to continue in this career" "I've always worked at the institution and I like it. I see myself continuing"
Identification, Belonging, or Institutional Bond	Sense of belonging, identification with the institution, affective or historical bond (being there from the beginning, having been a student, feeling like family), finding oneself professionally in teaching/institution.	7,2 (11)	"I've been here since the beginning of the institution" "I love working with students and at this company where I was also a student" "I've always worked at the institution and I like it. I see myself continuing"
Belief in Education or Sense of	Belief in education, in medical teaching, sense of educational purpose	7,8	"Love for the cause"

* n = number of responses coded in each category; % calculated over the total of 153 responses. As multiple coding was allowed, the sum of frequencies exceeds 100%

Thematic Category	Definition	% (n)*	Representative Examples
Purpose/Mission	or mission, believing in the work performed, in the importance of teaching.	(12)	"I believe in the importance of quality medical education" "Working at a medical university is a personal purpose"

* n = number of responses coded in each category; % calculated over the total of 153 responses. As multiple coding was allowed, the sum of frequencies exceeds 100%

Table 3
Thematic categories of faculty satisfaction

Thematic Category	Definition	% (n)*	Representative Examples
Relationship with Students and Teaching	Mentions of contact with students, teaching-learning process, student evolution and learning, student recognition or feedback, impact on training future physicians, knowledge transmission and teaching activity itself.	59,3 (115)	"Student recognition" "The possibility of learning from colleagues and observing student evolution over time" "The possibility of contributing to the training of new physicians with good professional skills and a humanistic vision of the profession they have embraced"
Work Environment and Interpersonal Relationships	Mentions of work environment, organizational climate, relationships with faculty colleagues and other staff, teamwork, camaraderie, companionship, mutual respect, coexistence and quality of interpersonal relationships at the institution.	31,4 (61)	"Very adequate campus infrastructure, excellent professional environment, possibility to carry out projects" "Organization, colleague support and good work environment" "Work environment. Freedom to innovate" "The excellent group of faculty I'm part of, very good work and learning environment"
Infrastructure and Institutional Resources	Mentions of physical structure, facilities, material and technological resources, working conditions, institutional organization, space functionality and availability of resources necessary for teaching activities.	12,9 (25)	"Very adequate campus infrastructure, excellent professional environment, possibility to carry out projects" "Organization, colleague support and good work environment" "I see that it is a serious and organized institution, with a tendency to grow and improve more and more, ready to acquire new technologies and modernize quickly, meeting new

* n = number of responses coded in each category; % calculated over the total of 194 responses. As multiple coding was allowed, the sum of frequencies exceeds 100%

Thematic Category	Definition	% (n)*	Representative Examples
			educational trends and student expectations"
Autonomy and Pedagogical Freedom	Mentions of autonomy to plan classes and activities, freedom to choose teaching methods and strategies, possibility to innovate pedagogically, creativity in teaching work and flexibility to make decisions related to the teaching-learning process.	4,6 (9)	"Very adequate campus infrastructure, excellent professional environment, possibility to carry out projects" "Work environment. Freedom to innovate"
Recognition and Institutional Valorization	Mentions of recognition of teaching work by the institution or peers, professional valorization, benefits offered, institutional support for faculty, feeling appreciated/important to the institution, respect for the teacher role and encouragement for professional development.	7,7 (15)	"Structure and support for faculty development" "Being recognized and valued for my work"
Professional Development and Continuous Learning	Mentions of opportunities for continuous learning, professional growth, knowledge updating, personal development related to work, intellectual challenges, learning from colleagues and faculty development activities.	11,3 (22)	"The possibility of learning from colleagues and observing student evolution over time" "The excellent group of faculty I'm part of, very good work and learning environment" "Structure and support for faculty development"
Institutional Quality and Reputation	Mentions of quality of education offered by the institution, excellence of faculty, institution's reputation and credibility in the market, pride in belonging to the institution, external recognition of institutional quality and commitment to excellence.	19,1 (37)	"The excellent group of faculty I'm part of, very good work and learning environment" "I see that it is a serious and organized institution, with a tendency to grow and improve more and more, ready to acquire new technologies and modernize quickly, meeting new educational trends and student expectations" "Gradually the course has gained greater credibility in the market"

* n = number of responses coded in each category; % calculated over the total of 194 responses. As multiple coding was allowed, the sum of frequencies exceeds 100%

Table 4
Thematic categories of faculty dissatisfaction

Thematic Category	Definition	% (n)*	Representative Examples
Remuneration/Benefits	Mentions of low/inadequate salary, insufficient remuneration, absence or inadequacy of benefits (health plan, profit sharing, childcare assistance), salary differences between physician and non-physician faculty, lack of full payment during vacations.	27,1 (52)	"The remuneration that doesn't allow me to be 100% there" "The salary is very low" "Differences in benefits for physician and non-physician teachers" "Low professional recognition and total absence of a career plan"
Recognition/Valorization	Mentions of lack of professional recognition, devaluation of teaching work or role, lack of institutional or coordination support, absence of career plan, feeling undervalued/not respected as a professional, specific devaluation of non-physician faculty.	10,4 (20)	"Differences in benefits for physician and non-physician teachers" "Lack of support and recognition from the university" "Low professional recognition and total absence of a career plan"
Infrastructure/Resources	Mentions of deficient infrastructure (teaching hospitals, clinics, classrooms), lack of adequate physical space, insufficient material resources, precarious practice settings, lack of research resources, absence of parking, difficulty accessing publications.	13,5 (26)	"Lack of some resources for research, physical space in practice" "Support at practice units" "Access to information systems" "Difficulties in accessing publications (journals and

* n = number of responses coded in each category; % calculated over the total of 192 responses. As multiple coding was allowed, the sum of frequencies exceeds 100%

Thematic Category	Definition	% (n)*	Representative Examples
			books). Little practical information about available resources"
Workload/Excessive Demands	Mentions of excessive work, task overload, last-minute/urgent demands, excessive meetings, demands outside academic hours, rework, after-hours communication (WhatsApp), very large classes, excessive number of students, excessive bureaucracy.	16,1 (31)	"Last-minute demands, excess of new platforms, technologies and methodologies imposed by the teaching administration without any evidence proving any benefit to learning" "The remuneration that doesn't allow me to be 100% there" "Urgent demands all the time"
Autonomy/Participation	Mentions of loss or lack of faculty autonomy, lack of participation or consultation in decisions (curricular, pedagogical, methodological), top-down imposed decisions, lack of space to implement own ideas, imposed methodologies/technologies/changes without prior consultation, external interference in teaching work, non-participatory curriculum or processes.	6,8 (13)	"Last-minute demands, excess of new platforms, technologies and methodologies imposed by the teaching administration without any evidence proving any benefit to learning" "Some situations where the national academic coordination 'shows up' with far-fetched ideas about teaching methodologies that partly disrupt the course and are not discussed with the faculty"

* n = number of responses coded in each category; % calculated over the total of 192 responses. As multiple coding was allowed, the sum of frequencies exceeds 100%

Thematic Category	Definition	% (n)*	Representative Examples
Problems with Students	Mentions of student disinterest/lack of commitment, disrespectful/rude students, student pressure, indiscipline, students who miss class, "spoiled" students, excessive unfounded student voice, excessive questioning, cell phone use in class.	14,6 (28)	"Lack of commitment from some students and professionals" "Feeling of job insecurity and meanness from some students" "Uncommitted or disinterested students"
Organizational Problems	Mentions of lack of institutional organization, last-minute calendar changes, unpredictability, instability (workload, class offerings), inadequate communication, lack of information about processes, bureaucracy in processes, mercantilist/commercial decisions, disconnect between management and reality.	21,4 (41)	"Last-minute demands, excess of new platforms, technologies and methodologies imposed by the teaching administration without any evidence proving any benefit to learning" "Some situations where the national academic coordination 'shows up' with far-fetched ideas about teaching methodologies that partly disrupt the course and are not discussed with the faculty" "Urgent demands all the time"
Interpersonal Problems (colleagues)	Mentions of problems with faculty colleagues (lack of cooperation, lack of pedagogical skills but valued, resistance to change), internal conflicts, lack of teamwork, gossip, closed/cold environment, lack of integration between faculty/areas.	5,7 (11)	"Lack of commitment from some students and professionals" "When people don't want to

* n = number of responses coded in each category; % calculated over the total of 192 responses. As multiple coding was allowed, the sum of frequencies exceeds 100%

Thematic Category	Definition	% (n)*	Representative Examples
			change old practices" "Internal conflicts, attitude of some faculty members"

* n = number of responses coded in each category; % calculated over the total of 192 responses. As multiple coding was allowed, the sum of frequencies exceeds 100%

Discussion

This study investigated factors influencing faculty retention in a Brazilian private medical school. The findings reveal a surprising scenario: a very high retention intention (82% intend to stay, 16.5% uncertain) contrasts with frequent and substantial criticism of working conditions, particularly regarding remuneration, recognition, and organizational problems. This contrast suggests that, in this context, intrinsic motivational factors related to teaching play a fundamental role in retention, acting as a counterweight to perceived adverse institutional conditions.

The predominance of "Satisfaction and Fulfillment with Teaching" (43.1%) as a reason to stay corroborates what is widely described in international literature, which identifies intrinsic motivations as central for medical faculty [20–26]. However, it is important to consider the structural context of medical teaching, especially in Brazil, for a deeper interpretation of this finding. Faculty remuneration is substantially lower than clinical practice compensation, and in our study, for the vast majority of participants, teaching does not constitute their central professional activity: 91.3% reported having another professional activity besides their institutional affiliation, 73.4% dedicate less than half their weekly workload to this affiliation, and for nearly three-quarters (73.3%), teaching contributes less than half their total income—with the majority (56.3%) earning less than one-quarter from teaching. This profile suggests that these individuals do not depend primarily on teaching for their livelihood and consequently may seek non-material returns from it. The data seem to reveal not merely individual preference, but rather reflect a professional profile shaped by market conditions, for whom personal fulfillment, student relationships, and sense of contribution become the pillars sustaining their choice to work in teaching.

The absence of demographic or professional differences between faculty committed to staying and those uncertain suggests that retention decisions in this context are driven primarily by motivational and institutional factors rather than by structural differences in faculty profiles. This finding has critical implications for educational quality management. This dual-affiliation faculty profile with predominantly intrinsic motivation likely presents challenges for professional identity formation, a phenomenon widely documented in literature on health professions faculty identity, where many identify more as physicians who teach rather than as medical educators [11, 12]. This identity configuration has been extensively

documented as a significant barrier to engagement with faculty development programs. Faculty who do not view pedagogy as central to their profession may perceive pedagogical training as an accessory demand, competing with time dedicated to clinical or research activities (perceived as central to their career progression). This scenario becomes particularly critical in the current Brazilian context of rapid medical school expansion and growing regulatory pressure for teaching quality [1, 2, 3]. How can demands for pedagogical excellence be met with a faculty whose working conditions position teaching as a secondary professional activity? This adds complexity to the initial paradox: the intrinsic motivation that ensures retention may have limits in its transformative potential for quality improvement unless teaching becomes more centrally valued in professional career progression.

The retention intention level in our sample (98.5% combining "Yes" and "Maybe") contrasts sharply with those reported in studies from academic medical centers, mainly North American, where 25% to 42% of professionals seriously consider leaving their institution or academic career [21–23]. Beyond possible methodological differences, this divergence appears to reflect important contextual differences. In international studies, intention to leave is frequently linked to toxic organizational culture, lack of community, and burnout. In our context, these factors did not emerge as central. On the contrary, participants expressed high institutional pride (94.7%) and valued the environment and interpersonal relationships as sources of satisfaction for 31.4% and rarely sources of dissatisfaction (5.7%). This suggests that, in this institution, the relational environment functions more as a protective resource than as a stress-generating demand, contributing to a sense of community that positively modulates work experience. However, it is important to acknowledge that possible non-response bias among deeply disengaged faculty could partially affect these findings. The frankness and critical tenor of many responses, especially regarding remuneration and recognition, suggest the sample captured significantly dissatisfied voices, though this cannot entirely rule out selection bias.

The paradox between high retention and substantial extrinsic dissatisfaction can be interpreted through the Job Demands-Resources model [17]. Notably, student relationships function simultaneously as resource and demand. On one hand, they emerge as the most frequently cited source of work satisfaction (59.3%) and an explicit retention factor (7.2%). On the other hand, they constitute a significant demand, viewed as a source of dissatisfaction by 14.6% of faculty who mention student disinterest, indiscipline, or pressure. Faculty also possess other strong resources as ”sense of contribution” and “positive work environment” but face clear extrinsic demands: remuneration perceived as low (the main cause of uncertainty, 25.8%), lack of professional recognition, and organizational problems (21.4% dissatisfaction). The sustainability of this balance can be explained by the faculty profile already described. These are experienced professionals with established clinical or research careers, for whom teaching is a complementary activity. This configuration of multiple income sources means that the decision to stay is made based on predominantly affective and identity-based criteria rather than financial necessity. Thus, intrinsic resources act as an effective buffer against extrinsic demands, since teaching is configured more as a vocational choice than a necessity for this specific group.

The uncertain faculty contingent ("Maybe," 16.5%) reveals a group where this balance may break. Their stated reasons ”salary, lack of recognition, and better external opportunities” align with findings where salary concerns and career advancement were primary reasons for leaving [20, 26]. However, our data also reveals a strategic opportunity: 60.7% of faculty express desire for greater institutional involvement, with specific interests in research (24.3%) and teaching activity planning (20.9%). This latent engagement capital suggests the institution possesses a reservoir of goodwill and interest that can be channeled. The 44.8% of faculty with less than five years' tenure may represent an audience particularly receptive to engagement initiatives. Therefore, an integrated approach that simultaneously addresses extrinsic concerns to retain the uncertain while creating structured pathways to channel expressed interests into actual participation seems most congruent with the described scenario.

Limitations and Strengths

The main limitation is the cross-sectional design in a single institution, which prevents causal inferences and limits generalization. The measure of "intention to remain" is a predictor, not observed retention. Potential non-response bias among deeply disengaged faculty could lead to overestimation of retention intention. Additionally, the sample composition, with 44.8% of faculty in their first five years, may mean findings are more representative of newer faculty than longer-tenured colleagues.

The high response rate partially mitigates self-selection concerns. Guaranteed anonymity appears to have fostered frank responses, as evidenced by the frequency and direct tenor of complaints about remuneration and recognition. This openness increases confidence that dissatisfaction data are trustworthy and that the sample included critical voices. The mixed-methods approach allowed rich, contextualized understanding, with qualitative analysis benefiting from substantial textual responses (n = 194 for satisfaction/dissatisfaction).

Conclusions

Faculty at this Brazilian private medical school demonstrate strong retention intention, driven primarily by satisfaction with teaching itself. However, this commitment coexists with substantial criticism of low salaries and lack of recognition. The predominant profile ”professionals for whom teaching is a secondary activity” shapes both the nature of their commitment and the challenges for quality improvement. These findings reveal a paradox: love for teaching retains faculty, but material undervaluation and secondary professional positioning create barriers to deep pedagogical engagement.

The practical relevance of these findings lies in alerting institutions in similar contexts that strategies to retain and develop faculty will need to work on two fronts simultaneously: leveraging the intrinsic motivation that already drives them while constructing concrete responses to their demands for professional recognition and career development. Specifically, creating structured pathways for the 60.7% who desire greater involvement, while addressing compensation and recognition concerns of the

16.5% uncertain about staying, represents a strategic opportunity for institutions navigating the dual challenge of expansion and quality improvement in Brazilian medical education.

Declarations

Ethics approval and consent to participate

As stated in Methods section, this study was conducted in accordance with the principles of the Declaration of Helsinki and was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of Estácio de Sá University (CEP/UNESA) on June 11, 2024, under opinion number 6.880.799 (CAAE 79130724.0.0000.5284). The research followed all ethical precepts established by Resolution No. 466/2012 of the National Health Council. All participants provided informed consent prior to participation in the study.

Consent for publication

Not applicable. This manuscript does not contain any individual person's data in any form (including individual details, images, or videos).

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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Author Contribution

GFT: Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Formal Analysis, Writing – Original Draft, Writing – Review & Editing.EM: Conceptualization, Investigation, Writing – Review & Editing.FMF: Conceptualization, Investigation, Writing – Review & Editing.KMPR: Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Writing – Review & Editing.IMDP: Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Writing – Review & Editing.All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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Data Availability

The data sets generated and analyzed during the current study are not publicly available due to participant privacy and institutional confidentiality concerns but are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request and with appropriate ethical approval.

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- SupplementaryFile1Questionnaire.pdf