
ACADEMIC STAFF TURNOVER IN NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES: CHALLENGES AND WAY FORWARD

BY

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Abstract

The issue of academic turnover in Nigerian universities poses severe challenge to university system as a sizable number of proven scholars from the institutions have migrated abroad in search of greener pastures in the last two decades, while many of them have been absorbed into universities and Centers of Research in Europe, America and Asian countries. Nigerian universities have witnessed a series of industrial conflicts due to the failure of the employers to review their conditions of service and the progressive encroachment upon the power and authority of the governing council as well as internal day-to-day administration of universities through government directives. Thus, job continuity and turnover among University lecturers has often attracted the attention of educational administrators, planners, policy makers, agencies and relevant stakeholders. Therefore, the study examined academic staff turnover in Nigerian universities: challenges and way forwards. The concept of turnover was scholarly examined from different perspectives. Specifically, it discusses the causes, such as: inadequate funding of education, poor conditions of service for academics when compared to their counterparts abroad, poor state of infrastructural facilities, oppression of academic staff and interference of government in institution's internal affairs among others. The study concluded that the magnitude at which academics leave universities in Nigeria poses serious challenges to university education in the country. To curtail this menace in Nigerian universities, adequate funding of universities, provision and rehabilitation of decay infrastructures, open administration, non-interference of government in university internal affairs and wooing professionals in diaspora back to the country become imperative.

Keywords: Academic staff, Turnover, Universities, Challenges and Way forward

Introduction

Universities need adequate academic workforce suitably knowledgeable to focus on the obligations of teaching, research, and community engagement. Thus, the need to retain and attract first-class academic staff cannot be overemphasized for the institutions to actualize her mandates. However, retention of employees in higher education institutions is a serious concern that poses a major challenge to these institutions. High employee turnover has grave implications on the quality, consistency, and stability of academic enterprises. Turnover can have detrimental effects on students and remaining academic staff members, who struggle to give and receive quality services, when positions are vacated and then filled by inexperienced personnel. High turnover rates strengthen clients' mistrust of the system and discourage workers from remaining in, or even entering, the field (Horwitz et al, 2017). The dearth of academic staff and the failure of universities to retain quality academic staff continue to be crucial to the changing prospects and potentials of knowledge formation and learning. The quality of education in an educational institution depends greatly on the quantity and quality of staff in the institution. In Nigeria, provision of quality education in tertiary institutions has over the years been threatened by shortage of academic staff and worsened by exodus of many among those available in the institutions to better jobs in both developed and developing countries.

Academic staff turnover is a challenge of enormous intent and dimension as public fund which would have been exhausted for the provision of facilities, materials and equipment for the education and training of individual, who on the completion of schooling resigns for some other jobs due to one reason or the other (Ajayi, 2020). It becomes evidently clear that turnover is counterproductive for the realization of university mandate of teaching, research and public service. Thus, to the individual academic staff, turnover involves several loss of earning which would have accrued if the individual were otherwise engaged. (Tamuno, 2018). The magnitude at which academic staff leave universities environment in Nigeria is alarming and constitutes serious challenges to university education in the country. Evidently, turn over or what is otherwise known as brain drain syndrome in university milieu was due to lack

of academic freedom, poor compensation package, disappointing working environment, increased enrolment, as well as pitiable conditions of service (Ajayi et al., 2017). These problems have made the university settings defectively conducive for effective teaching and learning process. Turnover is a phenomenon that afflicted the university education in Nigeria particularly in the 21st Century that the institutions have lost skilled scholars to underdeveloped countries like: Ghana and Rwanda and industrialized countries like: Britain, America, France and Germany (Osasuli, 2019).

Lecturers' turnover has severe effects on service quality, institutional image, academic synergies, scope of knowledge production, consistency and stability of academic enterprise. Academic staff left universities as a result of anxiety of rationalization, retrenchment and retirement often choose to find their exit before the powers give the marching orders. The reasons advanced for the turnover include: increasing pauperization, diminished power and prestige, salaries and conditions of service, which do not commensurate with their services or contributions. Added to this is the fact that the attributes, which habitually keep the academic mind in the universities – rich collection of up-to-date books and journals in libraries, functional laboratories, bustling seminars, research grants, have all become rare commodities (Sanda, 2020). High labour turnover threatens the development, innovation for efficiency, continued existence, good will and credibility of an organization, universities inclusive. Although, labour turnover is inevitable in an organization due to illness, accidents, aged, death and a variety of personal reasons bring about separation, however too much of labour it severely reduce productivity, as workers are perpetual learners, new to the organization all the time; demoralize incumbents and damage an organization's public image thereby adversely affecting her corporate existence (Ajayi, et al., 2017). Consequently, some of the lecturers prefer to look out for other job conditions that are more favourable which have resulted in making the university environments generally defectively advantageous for effective teaching and learning process. Staff retention is one of the most critical issues facing organizational managers that increasingly gaining attention as a result of globalization, technological advancement and heavy expenses associated with hiring of innovative employees in a competitive labour market. A motivated workforce is crucial to the success and survival of any organization in today uncertain and turbulent business climate with its ever rising competition (Smit, et al., 2021). Thus, appropriate understanding of staff expectations regarding the work environment becomes critical issues for the management of educational system in their abilities to retain academic employees. It is against this backdrop that the study examined academic staff turnover in universities: challenges and way forward.

Concept of Turnover

Turnover as a phenomenon being considered from plethora of angles depending on the subject in question. Derek (2018) remarked that turnover is the mount into and out of an organization or rate of withdrawal among staff engaged in an institution for a given time frame or period by the workforce. Robbin (2021) viewed turnover as the deliberate and instinctive permanent departure from rendering services to an organization which may be in the form of quits, discharges, lay-off, retirement, leaves of absence and even death. Academic staff turnover is one of the unorganized forms of industrial conflict and retreat by employees usually emanated from unsatisfactory situations. The incidence of labour turnover can at times be seen as a reflection of the quality of management skill in securing contentment among the people employed (Ongow, 2017). It is truism that certain amount of labour turnover is inevitable due to illness, accidents, aging, death and a variety of personal reasons bring about separation. However, too much of academics turnover can severely reduce productivity, as workers are perpetual learners, new to the organization all the time; demoralize incumbents and damage an organization's public image there by adversely affecting her corporate existence (Oyewole, 2018). Organizations are highly concerned about employees' departure because it is commonly very costly to select and train new employees to replace those who left. There is a general situation of discontent pervading the entire labour scene in Nigeria. Nigerian university teachers are not unaffected by this general state of anomaly and frustration over the last 30 years as sizable number of academic staff have migrated abroad in search of greener pastures (Baiys, 2022). Thus, turnover is the movement of academic staff, who are in charge of the training of less skilled individuals, from one tertiary institution to another or to another job entirely, within a country or another country.

Factors Responsible For Turnover in Nigerian Universities

Scholars have attributed the predominance rate of turnover to numerous factors, even though there is convergence of opinions expressed in literature. Among such factors are:

1. Decaying Infrastructure and Facilities in Institutions: Pitiably conditions of classrooms, laboratories, workshops, office space, library and other specialized rooms prerequisite for imparting knowledge and skills to students. The issue of inadequate and decay infrastructural facilities at all levels of the educational system has been a concern to education stakeholders in university education. Regrettably the existing classrooms in many tertiary institutions in Nigeria are derisory for the population of students and effective teaching and learning. Personnel office is relevant in institutions because it serves as a place where academic staff assess their written works, prepare for the next day's activities, and relax after working. In many tertiary institutions, these are inadequate for the available staff while those that are available are not large for relieve capacity of staff and even not sufficiently furnished. This situation, do discourage many academic staff particularly when they compare themselves to their counterparts in the foreign countries.

2. Paucity of Funds: In an ideal situation, one of the mandates of university is to serve as centre for research. Academic staff are there for expected to carry out research on the challenges facing the country, with a view of providing lasting solution to them. Research needs fund for it to be carried out effectively and achieve its objectives. The issue of research funding in tertiary institutions in Nigeria, leaves much to be desired. Many researches had been abandoned due to insufficient funds which frequently demoralizes lecturers and compelled them to leave for foreign countries where opportunity for such, abound.

3. Irregular Promotion of Staff: In an ideal situation, staff of tertiary institution who are qualified for promotion, supposes to be promoted as and when due. There are situations where staff of tertiary institutions will not be promoted due to one reason or the other, particularly when the concerned staff is having an axe to grind with management. These often lead to staff leaving their institutions for another where their regular promotion can be guaranteed. Baiys (2022) observed that many academic staff, who are due for promotion in public tertiary institutions but are denied, are often wooed by the state and private tertiary institutions with shortage of staff. Such staff are often promised extra allowance and opportunities apart from their regular promotion.

4. Corruption Practices: Corruption has been the bane of the development of the economy of Nigeria. As at 2013, Nigeria ranked 144th out of the 177 countries. Educational institutions are not even spared in the issue of corrupt practices in Nigeria. Many forms of corruption thrive in tertiary institutions in Nigeria, such as favoritism/nepotism in the allocation of allowances, fellowships; collection of bribes; collusion with contractors, by pass of allocation criteria such cases of corrupt practices of the leaders do discourage staff many among who do take solace in leaving their institutions for jobs in other countries.

5. Rising Insecurity: One of the basic needs of man is the guaranty of his/her security, that is, the security of all citizens ought to be guaranteed by the government in power, whether at the state or federal level. The situation in Nigeria over the years leaves much to be desired. Killing of innocent citizens and destruction of properties have been rampant. The case of Boko Haram insurgency which originated from the Northern part of Nigeria but now spreading to other parts is disturbing. Many lives of staff and students of tertiary institutions had been lost while properties destroyed through the activities of the insurgents. There is no doubt that many of the casualties are academic staff which will send wrong signal to their counterparts in other campuses. Without mincing words, kidnapping is now a lucrative business in Nigeria. What started in the Niger Delta areas few years ago, as a weapon for protesting over-exploitation of Oil without commensurate development in the region, has spread to every nooks and crannies of the country including educational institutions. The security headache in Nigeria at the present makes the country unsafe for the citizens and serving as impetus for many lecturers of tertiary institutions to flee the country for safety.

6. Introduction of horrible Policies by Government: Policies and programmes of government do have impact on the living standard of the citizens, which can be positive or negative. In the past, policies such as introduction of tuition fee, introduction of Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), withdrawal of subsidy on petroleum products,

deregulation of downstream petroleum sector, acceptance of loan for development of universities, were rebuffed by the masses including staff and students of tertiary institutions who could easily visualize their merits and demerits. Many lecturers had thus in the past arrested, humiliated, assaulted, and retired forcefully because of their grievances over governments policies and programmes. Many are thus forced to go on exile in other to avoid the embarrassing situation.

7. Poor Conditions of Service of Staff: It is often said that a labourer deserves his/her wage. The issue of wage has however been a sensitive issue in any organization, educational institution inclusive. Apart from its utilization in satisfying basic personal, family, other social and economic obligations, it is an indication of the regard for work and estimation of the skill, expertise, and worth of every worker. In Nigeria, monthly wage of lecturers of tertiary institutions is low, compared to what obtains in many countries in Africa and other continents in the world Worthy of note also is the fact that the salary of a professor in Nigeria is not up to what a fresh graduate earns in the telecommunication company, Oil companies, as well as Banks. Nigeria is even a country where the annual salary of a university professor is not up to the amount being spent to hire a coach for the country's football team. In the past, many strike actions had taken embarked upon in Nigeria due to inability of government to honour agreements reached with Staff, particularly on issues such as increase in salaries and allowances. Academic staff of universities in Nigeria appear to be dogs that must back before being given food to eat. The academic condition of service are uninspiring and motivating , while the attainment of basic necessities of life has become a mirage to the dedicated, enthusiastic and seasoned academic staff (Academic Staff Union of University, 2018).

8. Marital factor: Academic employees equally leave university system for reasons that are principally not connected to their work. The most prevalent instances involve people moving away when their spouses or partners relocated. Others include the desire to fulfill a long term ambition to travel, pressure attached with juggling the needs of work, family and illness. To an extent, such turnover is inevitable. Raymond (2020) emphasized that in this era of gender equality, women are struggling for egalitarianism in political and public positions and thus the like hood of far more available opportunities for women with high academic status is high. Also, most male academic that are married to female academics emigrate with their families when the opportunities come.

Consequences of Brain Drain in Tertiary Institutions in Nigeria

The issue of turnover has many consequences in universities such as:

1. Loss of Staff of Tertiary Institutions: Inadequacy of high-level manpower has been a feature of Nigeria. Little can one wonder that it has been a developing country when the indices of national development, are considered. It is worthy of note that should brain drain continue in Nigeria, many professionals and intellectuals in the ivory towers would emigrate which will induce poor rating of the universities among the other universities in the world. Should the trend of brain drain also continue in Nigeria, there is tendency for tertiary institutions to be filled with young and less experienced staff that lacks the necessary mentors and role models to guide student. It is not a gainsaying that some programmes are worst hit by dearth of lecturers. Presently, programmes such as medicine, engineering and technical, among others had lost majority of their staff to the gulf states of Saudi Arabia, Iran, Iraq and others such as USA, Great Britain. Should this continue, most of the programmes will suffer while poor training will be given the students involved.

2. Production of Low Quality Graduates: Ordinarily, the worth of an educational system can be measured by the quality of its outputs. It is thus expected that the graduates of educational institutions would be able to display quality skills and knowledge at their respective places of work. While it cannot be contested that educational institutions in Nigeria had produced graduates in different fields of science and technology, many among these graduates in various sectors of the economy, are of poor quality. Many scholars had criticized the quality of education at the three levels of the educational system in Nigeria, where all point to the fact that there is declining quality in such education To the extent that the employers of labour are complaining over the inability of those employed to perform. Many public and private establishments are thus spending huge money to train and retrain their employees in order to meet standard. Presently, graduates of tertiary institutions in Nigeria must pass aptitude tests before they can be employed.

3. Low Rating of Institution/Non-Accreditation of Courses: Many tertiary institutions and programmes may also suffer accreditation problem if this persist. It is worthy of note that some higher institutions had resulted to the rationalization of courses as a result of dearth of academic staff. The implication of this in a country that is characterized by high level unsatisfied higher education admission demand will be serious. This will indeed continue to aggravate the situation and makes tertiary education elitist in Nigeria. Quite unfortunate is the fact that an online report indicates that as at year 2014, no university in Nigeria is among the world best 500 universities list. The best university from the Africa continent was university of Cape Town, South Africa. In Africa, the best university from Nigeria (ObafemiAwolowo University, Ile Ife) ranked 44th while university of Ibadan and Benin ranked 65th and 69th respectively.

Measures to Curb Academic Staff Turnover in Nigerian Universities

Aluko (2022) enumerated the following measures for retaining academic staff in Nigerian Universities:

1. Attractive Compensation Package: attractive remuneration package is one of the key retention strategies of academics in that it relatively fulfills their financial and material desires. When the reward system is adequately managed, it helps to achieve the organization corporate objectives and retain productive workforce. Compensation package is regarded as the most vital motivational factor of retention among academic staff in educational system. Rosser (2018) found that wide disparity in salary system is one of the key indicators undermining the commitment of academics to their institutions and consequently their decision or intent to leave. Thus, the ability of universities to effectively align the rewards and incentives with staff requirements and interests help to retain productive workforce thereby facilitating the achievement of the set goals. The more attractive the overall packages, the better the retention and attrition of the employees (Umar, 2020).

2. Training and Development Opportunities: the importance of training and developing the academic staff cannot be undermined in a changing world and circumstance that lay more emphasis on quality teachers and students. It is considered a form of manpower development that provides employees with specific knowledge, abilities and skills required to enhance their competencies and deficiencies in performances (Chew, 2019). Career development has a potential effort on staff retention strategies. Organization that concentrates extensively on continuous training of staff will be in a much stronger position to retain the most talented employees, thus becoming an employer of choice (Boxal, etal, 2020) Tetty (2021) observed that training opportunities is the engine that keep the universities true to their mandates as centre of ideas and innovation. Therefore, training and career development programmes restrict academic staff from leaving the educational industry, increase loyalty and enhance professional competency there by facilitating the actualization of university goals. When academic staff are adequately trained, it saves the institution from expenses on selection and decline in productivity due to staff turnover.

3. Conducive working environment: pleasurable working setting reduces academic turnover and induce lower degree of job stress, while undesirable work environment often influence turnover decision. Jone (2018) observed that work environment that is comfortable and relatively low in physical or psychological stresses tends to enhance productivity and efficiency among academics and facilitate the attainment of educational goal. Rosser (2021) observed that few of educational industry provide adequate support for academic staff to integrate technology in to their works. The extents to which academics feel supported in terms of being provided with adequate and favourable facilities is critically important to overall quality of their work life and enhance their retention. The study of Walker and Arnold (2017) revealed that provision for supportive learning and working climate are crucial for the retention of talented academics.

4. Promotional Opportunities: this is an advancement of an employee in the hierarchy of an organization from a particular level to a higher level. Since the success of any educational system depends on the quality of its teachers in terms of possessing required abilities, knowledge and zeal to carry out their duties effectively, the school organization should not only be fair in their promotional exercise, but also make the staff perceive the promotion programme as being devoid of bias. Elevation of staff to higher status after satisfying the pre requisite conditions is fundamental to academic employees' retention and sustainability. Dockel (2021) argued that employees should not only be rewarded

financially, but also offer opportunities to growth within the institution. Souza (2022) in his findings discovered that employees who receive timely promotion and optimistic of promotional expectation in future are highly attracted in their respective places in the organization. Additionally, when employees are promoted as and when due, they think they are being elevated in their positions and carrier buildings is progressing, but when they do not get prompt promotion they become dissatisfied and thinking of leaving the organization. Theobald (2019) affirmed that to retain academic staff in the educational system, the institution management must create room for carrier advancement opportunities; failure to do so may result to brain drain of experienced and seasoned academic staff.

5. Wooing Academics in Diaspora Back to Nigeria: Government should woo the Nigerians professionals that are in exile back into Nigeria to invest in the economy or take up job in any of the sectors so that they can contribute to the development of the country in the present dispensation. This can be done through the introduction of immigration policies that will discourage the flow of skilled individuals out of the country. Government should develop a database of the professionals in various fields in the Diasporas using the internet and encourage more remittances from those in the diaspora so as to strengthen the economy of the nation.

Conclusion

Human resources in the right quantity and quality are *sine qua non* to a nation's development. Regrettably, lack of manpower, characterized university education in Nigeria, which is worsened by turnover. Talents exodus from universities Nigeria constitutes loss of resources invested on their training. At present, it is disturbing that Nigeria's universities are rated low in global ranking. One of the conditions for ranking universities is the quantity and quality of academic staff in stock. It is hopeful that if the strategies are adopted and implemented by Government and institutions' administrators, the menace will become a thing of the past while the state of tertiary education will improve from the status quo in Nigeria. Nigeria's developmental challenges demand that universities should be positioned as foremost place to prepare the nation for the expected leap forward. But the evidence seems to suggest that the institution remains ill prepared. This owes partly to the low morale of the academic staff, which in turn exacerbated the tempo of lecturers' turnover from the system. It is fair to say that lecturers will be enthusiastic, committed and goal oriented when the work environment is conducive; good welfare packages like good houses, adequate health and medical insurance, training and development opportunities and other relevant fringe benefits. In the absence of these, it can only be expected that dissatisfaction and eventually quits will result. Given their role in society, there is a strong case to pay unique attention to university academics while not constituting them into a special class. However, it is important to further explore opportunities to provide more incentives tenable lecturers make the most of their roles in the development process. In doing this, it is evident that economic inducement does not provide sufficient motivation for university lecturers'. A holistic approach that satisfactorily takes into account crucial on-economic factors as well must be employed.

Suggestions

Based on the study, the following suggestions were made:

1. Adequate funding of university education to enhance effective service delivery
2. Provision and rehabilitation of decay infrastructures and facilities in universities should be given priority
3. Unnecessary interference of government in university internal affairs should be avoided
4. Salaries and fringe benefits of lecturers should be enhanced and made relevant to prevailing economic circumstances by reviewing them periodically.
5. Academic staff developments should be accorded priority since possible growth and advancement on the job is a vital motivational factor.
6. Prominence should be given to the provision of research grants, while sponsored seminars and conferences should be prioritized to enrich the knowledge and skills of academic staff.

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