

## Academic Staff Turnover, National Development and Emerging Policy Issues

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**Abstract:** As far as development is concerned, education still remains the hope of developing nations to launch their economies on the path of progress. Without intensive teaching in higher institutions, research, and community service, there cannot be inventions and discoveries. These elements form the major functions of academic staff members in all higher institutions in the world. With high academic staff turnover in Nigeria's higher institutions, research exercises in the nation's academic ivory towers will be established on a shaky foundation. The paper examines the factors leading to high turnover in the institutions some of which are poor funding and academic environment, bad human resource management practices, poor salaries among others. The paper calls on the governments and leadership of higher institutions to institute retention plan to encourage staff members to stay and carry out their primary functions of teaching, research and community service, all of which are ingredients of development. Some of the measures suggested include high funding, convocation of research symposia, institutions of prizes and awards for inventors and discoverers and their institutions, employment of the right academic staff in relation to student population and creation of conducive environment as defined by these institutions among others.

**Keywords:** Education, academic staff, National development, Policies.

### INTRODUCTION

Education is known to be a continuous process in life, usually defined as the process of training and developing the knowledge, skill, mind and character of people, exposing the latent abilities of individuals so that they may be useful to themselves and the society. As the oldest industry, it is the main instrument used by societies to preserve, maintain and upgrade their value system.

The importance of education in the quest for national development has therefore made many nations (especially developing ones) to institute many programmes, which hopefully, will remove such nations from economic, social, cultural and political abyss. In Nigeria, there are many problems that have occupied the minds of stakeholders in education particularly and Nigerian leaders generally. These myriads of problems which have taken colossal amount of resources in tackling them, include HIV/AIDS pandemic, high level illiteracy, poverty, corruption, kidnapping, terrorism, bad leadership, discrimination against women, gender disparity (both in education, politics and employment), wastages in education, poor infrastructure to mention a few.

Some of the measures that have been adopted to tackle these challenges include media awareness on HIV/AIDS, amnesty programme, Subsidy Re-investment Programme (SURE-P), introduction of Public-Private Partnership (PPP), military deployment to troubled areas in the country through the formation of Joint Task Force (JTF), introduction of Strategy for the Acceleration of Girls' Education in Nigeria (called SAGEN-Plus) among others. Yet from all indications,

these approaches seem to have little or no impact in addressing the challenges confronting the nation: crimes and unemployment are on the increase, poverty level is alarming, political and economic strife are tearing the nation apart. How then can the country develop?

Meanwhile, developed nations of the world are excelling today in all spheres of their national activities due to huge amount of investment in research and education spearheaded by scholars in their higher institutions. The reverse has been the case in Nigeria with meager amount of investment in research and education going by lamentations from leaders and Unions of higher institutions. More worrisome is the issue of brain drain. The toll exerted by the brain drain phenomenon and the low rating of the teaching profession according to Kolawole [1] "had exerted profound influences on teacher quality. Many highly qualified teacher trainers migrated to Europe, North America and Asia in the early '80s leaving behind a large number of inexperienced in the universities and colleges of education".

As stated above, the academic staff of Nigerian higher institutions that should be involved in intensive teaching, research and community service have continued to leave the country for greener pastures. Expectedly, they are to spearhead efforts that will lead to inventions and discoveries and launch the country to the path of progress. The synergy of the key elements of teaching, research and community service is the bedrock of national development. With high academic staff turnover in Nigerian higher institutions, this will be difficult to achieve and the effort to use education to achieve national development will be a dream that may

never come to reality. One may therefore need to ask the following questions: why are academic staff that should spearhead the efforts towards national development leaving the country and what policy issues can arise from the current situation to serve as a guide towards using education as a tool for national development? It is therefore the focus of the paper to examine the causes of turnover in Nigeria, suggest measures that will encourage academic staff retention on the one hand and make them productive in the quest towards national development especially in the areas of research, community service and teaching.

### **Turnover and Productivity in Organisations**

There are various views about turnover as expressed by different authors. The Bureau of Labour Statistics (2008) which defines labour turnover as “the rate at which an employer gains and loses employees, also describes it as “how long employees tend to stay or the rate of traffic through the revolving door”. Staff turnover as explained by Oredein and Alao [2] “is the voluntary or involuntary termination of an individual’s employment with a given organisation”. Labour turnover as used by Abassi and Hollman [3] “is the rotation of workers around the labour market, between firms, jobs and occupations, and between the states of employment and unemployment”. In Woods’ [4] expression, “each time a position is voluntarily or involuntarily created, a new employee might be replaced, this replacement cycle is known as turnover”.

The implication of all these is that management should be concerned about the level of labour turnover in their organisation, determine the degree of it that is healthy or unhealthy for the organisation, because, as noted, high labour turnover is dangerous and it affects the growth and productivity of an establishment. Thus, the need to plan effectively for workers’ retention through good human resource management practices made the research workers of Tavistock Institute of Human Relations as exposed by Armstrong [5] to describe the way work should be organised as ‘socio-technical’, which links the work organization with its technical element. They refer to the organisation as an ‘open’ system (one affected by outside factors, particularly economic ones) and as ‘organic’ (adaptable to change).

### **Causes of Staff Turnover (in Nigerian Higher Institutions)**

High turnover often means that employees “are unhappy with the work or compensation” according to Skabelund [6], but it can also indicate unsafe or unhealthy conditions, or that too few employees give satisfactory performance (due to unrealistic expectations or poor candidate screening). A number of other issues such as lack of career opportunities and challenges, dissatisfaction with the job-scope or conflict with the management have also been cited as predictors of high turnover by Ruby [7]. A number of factors are

responsible for employee turnover. The prospect of getting higher pay elsewhere in the expression of Cole [8] “is one of the most obvious contributors to turnover”. This practice can be regularly observed at all levels of the economic ladder, from executives and generously paid professionals in high-stress positions to entry-level workers in relatively undemanding jobs.

However, there is considerable evidence that money is often not the root cause of turnover, even when it is a factor in an employee’s decision to quit. Rather, some experts according to Cole [8] “believe that high turnover persists in certain jobs and certain companies because they have an atmosphere in which employees look for reasons to leave, and money is a convenient and sometimes compelling justification”.

Griffeth and Griffeth [9] also give their opinions as far as the causes of staff turnover in organisations are concerned some of which are as follows.

1. Prospect of getting higher pay elsewhere, a practice which can be observed at all levels of the economic ladder.
2. Environmental factors – most environmental contributors as identified can be directly traced to management practices. Turnover, in their words, tends to be higher in environments where employees feel they are taken advantage of, where they feel undervalued or ignored, and where they feel helpless or unimportant. Clearly, if managers are impersonal, arbitrary, and demanding, there is greater risk of alienation and turnover. Management policies can also affect the environment in basic ways such as whether employee benefits and incentives appear generous or stingy, or whether the organisation is responsive to employees’ needs and wants. Management’s handling of major corporate events such as mergers or layoffs is also an important influence on the work environment afterwards.
3. Some turnover is demographically specific, particularly for women who are balancing significant work and family duties at the same time. Such women (or men) may choose to leave an organization instead of sacrificing their other interests and responsibilities in order to make the job work out. Some women elect to quit their jobs at childbirth, rather than simply taking a maternity leave. Women’s perception of their career paths might also be tinted by their awareness of the glass ceiling, which may lower their level of commitment to any particular firm, since they believe they are not in contention for top-level jobs. These factors translate into higher rates for women in many organisations.
4. Retirement of experienced employees can cause high rates of turnover and extreme losses

in productivity in their explanations, particularly in organisations where there is little competition.

Using Olabisi Onobanjo University as a case study in Nigeria, Oredein and Alao [2] find “a statistically significant influence of work-family conflict and job satisfaction on labour turnover intentions among lecturers”. Work-family conflict according to them “is an inter-role conflict in which the role pressures from work and family domains are mutually incompatible in some respect”.

To Nicole [10], work-family conflict is a “common problem among employees; it is an undesirable situation and it negatively affects quite a number of other areas within and outside the family. These include an increase in prolonged fatigue, high level of absenteeism at the work, and labour turnover intentions”.

Getting satisfied on a job is very crucial to the long-term growth of any organisation. This is very closely related to efficacy, and, related to education industry, many teachers according to Dweck [11] “lose or fail to develop self-efficacy within educational settings”. There are some other factors that could influence lecturers or teachers to stay or leave their jobs as identified by Evans [12] and Maenpaa [13] which include “availability of material resources, teacher-students ratio, school environment and school culture, prompt payment of salary and feelings of successful teaching, among others”. It should be noted however that teachers or lecturers have different factors that could influence their job satisfaction. For instance, according to Oredein and Alao [2], “prompt payment of salary might be an influencing factor to a teacher while school environment might be an influence factor to another.

The marginal improvement in funding to higher institutions in Nigeria as observed by Kolawole (2013) [1] has not cleared the decay in infrastructural facilities in these institutions. Classrooms, laboratories, libraries and the general environment of most universities are still far from a state that will promote optimal teaching, learning and research. This has not only encouraged high staff turnover, but also led to sharp examination malpractice and cultism since students are not actively involved in rigorous academic activities.

Many lecturers, as things are in Nigeria, and through their actions, seem to hold the belief that they are not recognized in the country. In the words of Nwadiani [14], “it is observed but very sadly that Nigerian academics, as researchers, enjoy more prestige outside Nigeria than within”. It does appear that Nigeria and most Nigerians do not know what higher institutions stand for and have very little regard for

knowledge going by their attitude towards academic environment. Thus, it stands rational and justifiable that these crops of intellectuals resort to emigrate outside the higher institutions and even outside the country to where their productivity and worth are acknowledged.

Lamenting on the insufficient state of qualified teachers in Nigerian universities, Ayodeji [15] says “teacher adequacy is a function of many factors which include funding, student enrollment over time and staff turnover”. On enrollment issue in relation to staff turnover, Ephraim [16] add that “Nigerian public institutions have high enrollments without enough qualified instructors. As a result, staff/student ratios have worsened to the detriment of student learning and academic research.

Pieces of evidence available indicate that among the tertiary institutions in Nigeria, the university system is worst hit by the issue of turnover. For instance, according to Okunrotifa, agreed upon by the NUC and Nwadiani (Cited in [17]).

“The Nigerian university system has been in a high state of anxiety and frequent crises of different types and intensity. There are crises of internal governance and control, nepotism, ethnic chauvinism and favouritism, philosophy and mission, underfunding and shortage of facilities and equipment, crises of conditions of service and industrial unrest, brain drain and staff turnover. Of all the crises, those of scarce resources, underfunding, brain drain and staff turnover have been identified as most crucial and central.”

Of all the inputs into the Nigerian university system, the human resource, according to Ephraim [16], “would appear to be worst affected as the university staff are paid salaries which cannot take care of their basic needs”. Indeed, from all these, the university teacher, more than anyone else, requires a peaceful and conducive working environment to attain a healthy and efficient mind as the beacon of enlightenment.

Reporting on the analysis of World Bank on ‘retaining teaching capacity in African universities’ in 1995, Nwadiani [14] states that:

“23, 000 qualified academic staff are emigrating from Africa each year in search of better working conditions and 10,000 Nigerians are now employed in the United States alone. Equally too, no less than 5, 000 Nigerian medical specialists are in America, beside other specialists, non-specialists and other medical allied professionals in America, Europe, the Caribbean and in South Africa. It is observed that Nigerian academics, as researchers, enjoy more prestige outside Nigeria than within...”

Poor funding as a factor that results to brain drain in higher institutions in Nigeria, has created a

situation whereby Nigerian academics have left for greener pastures even to smaller countries like Rwanda, Ghana, Kenya and even South Africa as reported by Ujomu [18]. Even when enrolment continues to increase from 325, 299 in 1999/2000 session in Nigerian universities [19] to 433,821 in 2000/2001 session [20], the level of funding has been going down as observed by the writers, yet population in higher institutions has been increasing since then.

Strikes by Nigerian academics as a factor at heart of causes of staff turnover also deserves mention as this situation has led to some lecturers losing faith in the structure of the educational system. Academic Staff Union of Nigerian Universities (ASUU) for instance, as reported by Ujomu [18] has “gone on strike for several times, namely, in 1992, 1993, 1994, 1996, 1999, and 2001 to press home its demand for increased funding for the system. There was a total of 18,328 academic staff to look after 433,871 students and by NUC staffing norms, a total of 33,951 should be in the system. Therefore, the academic staff shortfall was 15,718 (46%) in the Nigerian universities in 2000 [20]. Still the Union is warming up for another strike presently as reported by Nigerian Newspapers due to the Federal government’s uncooperative attitude towards the agreements reached with the Union

Academic staff have also kicked against high-handedness by Nigerian higher institutions leaders,

especially at the university level, a strong factor that has contributed immensely towards staff turnover. According to Egbokhare [21], “arbitrariness and high handedness on the part of university authorities and vice-chancellors have often caused a lot of conflicts”. For instance, at the University of Abuja, the vice-chancellor, Professor Isa Mohammed unilaterally sacked thirty-five teachers, dissolved senate, created programmes and altered the academic structure of the university. He ran the university like chiefdom and with unbelievable brutality. In addition, Isa Mohammed was intolerant to the existence of alternative views and trade unions. The man would ultimately declare that he was the “law” [22].

Kolawole [1] in carrying out a study on factors responsible for high turnover in higher institutions in Lagos State observes that human resource management practices are largely responsible. Human resource management practices are defined as common or permanent practices adopted by higher institutions in Lagos state in relating with their staff members and how they affect their contributions to the growth or decline of the institutions. Some of these include policy fluidity, staff welfare, academic environment including offices and classrooms, research activities, communication flow, academic staff planning, appointment and promotion.

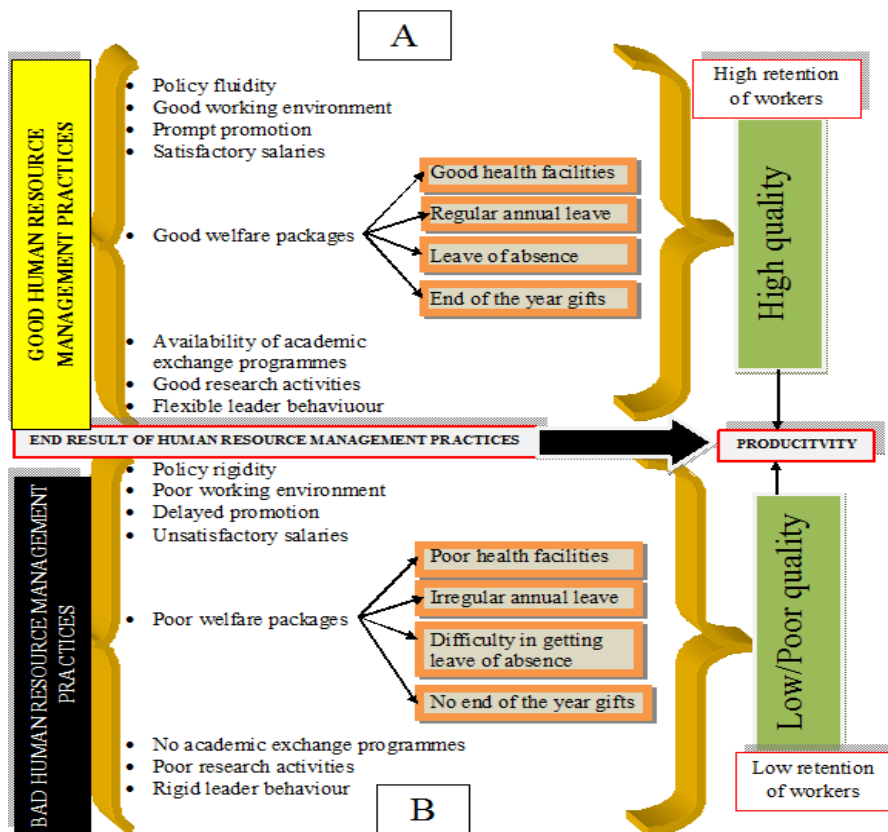


Fig. 1: Human resource management practices, workers’ retention rate and productivity [1].



Fig. 1 represents the mirror image of some of the human resource management practices available in organisations labelled here as A and B by Kolawole [1]. Portion A shows good human resource management practices made up of policy fluidity (or flexibility) of the organisation, good working environment, prompt promotion, satisfactory salaries, good welfare packages, availability of academic exchange programmes, challenging research activities and flexible leader behaviour exhibited by the organisation's leader(s). Portion B of Fig. 1 is diametrically opposite portion A. All things being equal, portion A would encourage high retention of workers (of good quality) and consequently lead to quality productivity. Whatever, the style of human resource management practices adopted; the end result is expected to produce quality output. This will however, depend on the quality of the input right from the planning stage.

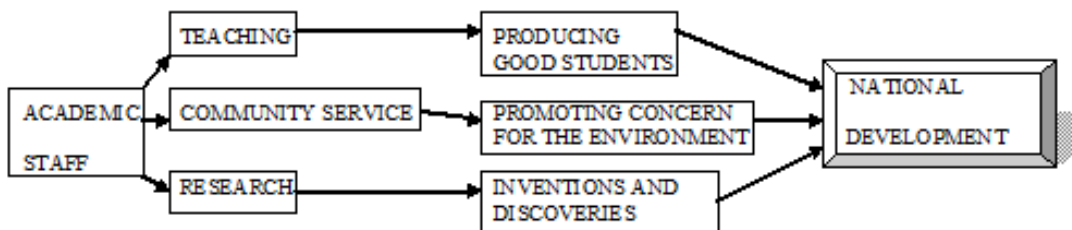
**Academic Staff Turnover: Effects on National Development and Emerging Policy Issues**

High turnover in Nigerian higher institutions has led to poor quality products in terms of graduates, which has led to many organizations lamenting gloomily about the quality of Nigerian graduates employed in the companies. A large mismatch appears

to exist between university output and labour market demand. The employment prospects of recent graduates have clearly deteriorated, the primary cause of which is the weak Nigerian economy, the policy environment and inadequate level of skilled human resources, especially the quality of the university-trained portion of the workforce as observed by Okebukola [23].

The direct effects of high turnover can be seen on the quality of products of higher education who cannot translate theory into practice and high teacher-students ratio. The indirect effect is expressed in the poor state of the nation.

Reports available on a daily basis always show that the economy is in the doldrums. Getting out of this abyss requires intensive research and community service from academic staff members supported with political and economic will from the drivers of the nation's economy. Given the fact that lecturers are leaving the country due to poor academic environment, how will development take place since Nigerian higher institutions are characterised by weak research exercise and the few available lecturers engaging in some illegal activities that take the bulk of their time.



**Fig. 2: The Direct and Indirect Effects of Academic Staff in National Development**

Fig. 2 shows the direct and indirect effects of academic staff in Nigeria's national development. The major functions of academic staff have been spelled out as teaching, community service and research which are expected to lead respectively to the production of quality graduates, promotion of concern for the environment (through security education, peace education and clean environment) and discoveries and inventions, all of which culminate into national development.

From the forgoing, it is clear that policy structure need be put in place to form the basis for educational planning. The indices for this structure have been exposed by this paper namely: employment of sufficient teacher quantity and quality, good human resource management practices by the leadership of higher institutions, enabling economic and political environment on the part of the drivers of the economy, intensive teaching, research and community service, huge investment on research activities, and research symposia.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on the emerging policy issues exposed above which are expected to serve as a guide for educational planning with the focus to retain academic staff members in Nigeria's higher institutions, the following recommendations are put forward.

1. Higher institutions in the country should maintain the required teacher/students ratio as approved by the appropriate government agencies. This requires that adequate number of academic staff should always be employed taking cognizance of quality as well.
2. The leadership of higher institutions in the country must always adopt good human resource management practices which must always be checked by monitoring government agencies as a retention plan. Such practices must reflect in policy fluidity, good working environment, prompt promotion, satisfactory salaries, among others.

3. Higher institutions should see research exercise as a challenge taking it as a healthy competition among themselves for the sake of national development. The introduction of Tertiary Education Training Fund (TETFund) by the government to encourage research exercise is a welcome idea. However, accessibility to the research funds should be hastened by the body responsible for disbursements.
4. Convocation of research symposia to exhibit discoveries and inventions from academic staff which are essential for national development. Prizes and awards must be instituted in this regard for deserving higher institutions and academic staff.
5. There must be support from the politicians who largely are in the control of the nation's financial resources. Educational planning without political support might likely end in a fiasco.
6. Above all, governments, especially state and federal should try and discourage academic staff turnover by providing all the necessary apparatuses needed for their retention thereby encouraging inventions and discoveries for the sake of national development.

#### CONCLUSION

A lot of illicit activities go on in the Nation's higher institutions particularly relation to sale of handouts, sex harassment and illegal collection of fees. Still there are cases of lecturers engaging in series of part-time programmes such as teaching and business activities. These are exercises that are inimical to serious academic challenges. Yet there are obvious cases of mass exodus of Nigerian academics to Europe, America, Asia and some African countries due to poor academic environments at home. There is a lot to be done by the Nigerian government to retain quality academic staff at home. Leaves can be borrowed from developed countries on strategies in this regard. In particular, there must be huge investment in research activities. If the country wants to be among the first twenty nations of the world by the year 2020 (Vision 20-2020), then research exercise must be at the fore front. Without academic staff members, there cannot be intensive researches and neither can there be development at a fast rate.

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