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Retention Strategy for Competent and Highly SkilledEmployees inAdamawa State Polytechnic, Yola, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT
Tertiary educational institutions rely heavily on the proficiency, knowledge, and competencies of their personnel for the successful and efficient provision of services. This is crucial in staying current with emerging developments and fulfilling the institutional vision. As a result, attracting and retaining competent staff members has become a critical aspect of institutional operations. In the absence of clear retention strategies, the achievement of institutional objectives may be hindered. This study aims to uncover the reasons behind staff resignation following participation in development programs, to help the institution formulate retention strategies. The study employs a case study approach, focusing on a specific institution in Yola, Adamawa State, Nigeria. A triangulation method was utilized, incorporating semi-structured interviews with key personnel and a closed-ended questionnaire administered to 230 staff members, with a response rate of 65%. The findings of the research indicate a lack of retention strategies and inadequate reward systems for retaining staff who have completed development programs. A substantial number of staff members have resigned from the institution after achieving higher qualifications and career growth. The absence of retention strategies was evident from the interviews with top management. Although staff members who obtained a higher degree were eligible for a salary increase, it was deemed insufficient by former staff members. The study recommends that the institution develop an innovative retention strategy and conduct an investigation into the roles of supervisors and senior management in employee retention. This paper provides valuable insights into current and former staff members' perspectives on employee retention at Adamawa State Polytechnic, Yola. Employee retention remains a persistent challenge for many tertiary educational institutions in the country, thus uncovering retention strategies and reasons for staff resignation after obtaining qualifications will benefit the institution. This will ensure the development of an effective retention strategy to retain the highly sought-after and skilled personnel crucial for the institution's growth and sustainability.

Keywords: employee, training, retention, strategy, institution.

I. INTRODUCTION

In today's highly competitive environment, competent and skilled employees are a scarce resource. It is imperative for institutions to proactively develop retention strategies to ensure that they retain these valuable employees. A solid retention strategy should begin with well-defined job descriptions, comprehensive orientation programs, and a rigorous recruitment and selection process. If any of these components are not executed effectively, it could have a direct impact on employee retention. In the case of tertiary educational institutions, high turnover can lead to declining student enrollment numbers and increased workload for remaining staff, causing frustration among employees.

As Kazeem (2012) has stated, employees are the foundation of an organization's success, and their efforts are what create wealth and allow institutions to achieve their goals. Given that the institution in question is the only state polytechnic within the state, it may find it challenging to attract and retain highly skilled staff due to the higher salaries offered by other sectors (Jame, Mike, &Namusonge, 2014). Therefore, developing effective retention strategies is of the utmost importance. By doing so, institutions can motivate

staff members, improve their performance, and potentially attract even more competent and skilled employees to the organization.

II. RETENTION

The growth of the global research market has made institutions cognizant of the fact that a suitable workforce can provide them with a competitive advantage (Curtain, 2018). Institutions aim to maintain an edge over their competitors to attract more students and prospective employees, leading to an increase in demand for skilled workers. As a result, institutions are competing to attract and retain top talent.

The labour market is subject to the principles of supply and demand, where employees and employers engage in negotiations regarding salaries and benefits. Money is a significant motivator for workers, but it can also lead to undesirable behaviour and a lack of commitment (Performance Management, 2006). Motivation is a crucial driving force for work (Churayath, 2019). To retain staff members, institutions must determine the factors that motivate their employees and develop strategies to address those needs.

The reasons behind individuals coming to work are rooted in their necessities and vary from person to person. Several theories have been proposed by authors such as Maslow, Herzberg, ERG, and McClelland (as cited in Robison, Odendaal, &Roodt, 2007) to explain what drives people to work. However, these theories have faced criticism for not accounting for why people leave their jobs and for not differentiating between sectors.

In the context of higher education institutions, which encompass academic, administrative, and support staff, the motivations to work can vary. Some professionals may join the field for altruistic reasons such as advancing the success of students and uplifting the community, while others may have both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations such as career advancement and training opportunities, financial compensation, social status, and paid time off (Mayer, 2006). On the other hand, non-professional staff may seek employment with institutions that provide them with flexibility, autonomy, support for personal growth, and opportunities to learn new skills (Chaudhary, 2016). Additionally, factors such as job description, induction processes, recruitment, and selection can also influence an employee's decision to leave an organization (Fletcher, Alfes, & Robinson, 2020). Therefore, institutions must understand the reasons for employee departure to develop and implement effective retention strategies that benefit both the organization and its employees.

According to Khan (2018), the key factors contributing to job departure include a lack of career advancement opportunities, a dead-end job, and a lack of upward mobility within an organization. Mayer (2006) found that employees' decisions to leave are influenced by factors such as salary, work-life balance, and career opportunities. The reasons for high turnover in higher education institutions, as stated by O'Connor (2018), include dissatisfaction with senior relations, unfavourable working conditions, insufficient research time, excessive workload, inadequate financial rewards, limited career advancement opportunities, and an imbalance of work and life. Mayer (2006) conducted a study in Australia and found that young academic staff members tend to leave due to factors such as excessive workload, lack of input indecision-making, desire for new challenges, teaching outside their field of expertise, insufficient autonomy, inadequate salary, and personal circumstances. The study revealed that workload was the most commonly cited reason for leaving, whereas salary was the least influential.

Osalusi (2014) pointed out that due to a competitive job market, highly competent and skilled employees with in-demand abilities will prioritize employability over job stability and may frequently change positions. Ogbowobi (2014) stated that workers with higher education credentials tend to earn higher salaries as their skillset enhances their stock of human capital and thus their productivity potential. These workers understand their value in the job market and can apply their abilities to bring sustained competitive advantage to an organization, according to O'Connor (2018).

According to Adenike, Oluwaseun, and Sunday (2017), there is a prevalent belief that individuals do not maintain long-term affiliations with a single organization and continually search for institutions offering better prospects and benefits. High turnover rates result in decreased morale, a tarnished organizational reputation, and impaired productivity (Temba, 2020). To mitigate these challenges, the implementation of retention strategies that cater to the retention of employees in sought-after fields is crucial.

The promotion of career development and identification and growth of employees with potential is beneficial for the employer as it results in employees possessing productive skills, knowledge, and attitudes. Flexibility in work arrangements is a significant contributor to employees leaving their current positions, thus academic staff should be offered flexible working hours to accommodate their lifestyles, non-financial rewards such as recognition through teaching awards and opportunities for personal growth and research, non-academic staff should be offered non-financial rewards such as

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responsibility, influence, personal growth and recognition for a job well done. It is imperative for institutions to acknowledge their employees' contributions and provide effective induction and orientation programs. Institutions should strive to create a supportive work environment, positioning themselves as an "employer of choice" to foster employee loyalty and attract new talent. Training and development opportunities should be made available, and a culture of teamwork and open communication should be cultivated, along with fair promotional opportunities for all employees.

According to Aleem and Borwa (2020), the lack of successful retention programs can result in a high turnover rate, where new employees are brought in through the front door while experienced ones depart through the back door. Mayer (2006) suggests that employees with in-demand skills often seek employment opportunities that offer larger rewards and greater opportunities for self-development, leading to a high degree of job mobility. To retain valuable staff members with specialized skills, institutions must implement effective retention strategies that include training and development initiatives. This will ensure that the organization can make the most of the skills and knowledge of its employees. To retain key staff members who have undergone development, job enlargement can be offered as a retention strategy, which involves adding new or challenging responsibilities to an employee's existing job (Jennifer and Nawar, 2018).

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND SAMPLING TECHNIQUE

The objective of the research was to determine the existence of retention strategies and identify the factors that prompt resignation among former staff members at Adamawa State Polytechnic, Yola. The study employed a case study methodology, focusing on the specific institution located in Adamawa State, Nigeria. Information was obtained through a triangulation approach, surveying academics, administrative staff, and support staff, for a total of 230 questionnaires distributed. Before the widespread distribution, a pilot test was conducted with three staff members of the Adamawa State Polytechnic, Yola. In addition to the questionnaires, face-to-face semi-structured interviews were conducted with former staff members who resigned after completing their qualifications through staff development programs, and key individuals within the institution.

The aim of interviewing former staff members was to understand their reasons for departure and provide recommendations to retain staff members participating in development programs. The purpose of the interviews with key individuals was to determine the presence of retention strategies and procedures in place to retain staff members who have attained higher degrees. The sample size consisted of academic staff members who resigned between the years 2017 to 2022, as they were deemed to be in a favourable position to respond objectively to the research questions. Ethical considerations were taken into account during the data collection and analysis process. Anonymity was guaranteed for the former staff members involved in the interview process, and confidentiality of information was maintained.

Table 1. Reward system for retention.

		Frequency	(%)	Valid %	Cumulative %
Valid	Strongly agree	6	4.6	4.8	4.8
	Agree	17	13.1	13.6	18.4
	Disagree	48	36.9	38.4	56.8
	Strongly disagree	54	41.5	43.2	100.0
	Total	125	96.2	100.0	
Missing	System	5	3.8		
	Total	130	100.0		

(n=130).

Table 2. Institutional climate.

		Frequency	(%)	Valid %	Cumulative %
Valid	Strongly agree	11	8.5	8.8	8.8
	Agree	40	30.8	32.0	40.8
	Disagree	40	30.8	32.0	72.8
	Strongly disagree	34	26.2	27.2	100.0
	Total	125	96.2	100.0	
Missing	System	5	3.8		
	Total	130	100.0		

(n=130).

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IV. DATA ANALYSIS

The research aimed to determine the existing reward and retention strategies by posing questions and statements. Additionally, the study made a diligent effort to uncover the factors that contributed to staff members' decision to resign from the institution following the attainment of their qualifications. The findings were obtained from a closed-ended questionnaire that was distributed.

4.5.2.5 Reward systems

The purpose of collecting this information was to assess the effectiveness of the institution's reward systems in retaining staff who have participated in training and development programs. The data, as presented in Table 1, reveals that a combined 17.7% (4.6% strongly agree + 13.1% agree) of respondents expressed a favourable view towards the institution's reward systems. Conversely, 78.4% (36.9% disagree + 41.5% strongly disagree) of respondents indicated that they did not believe the institution had adequate reward systems in place for staff retention.

Influence of Management Style on Staff Retention

The importance of management in creating a favourable work environment and retaining employees within an organization has been emphasized by various authors. Nguyen and Duong (2020) highlight that management plays a crucial role in fostering employee commitment and reducing turnover. Similarly, Beard (2007) suggests that employees leave managers rather than companies, emphasizing the significance of management's role in staff retention.

Lyria et al. (2017) argue that the responsibility for retaining high-performing employees should not be solely in the hands of the human resource department, but rather it should be shared by the leaders of the organization. Management has a critical role in fostering a culture of retention and preventing unwanted turnover by being the institution's best defence against losing valuable and skilled employees.Effective communication between management and employees is regarded as a core competency and a key responsibility for leaders. They should adopt a leadership style that establishes their competence and trustworthiness and guides their team members towards the achievement of the overall goal (Mat, 2008).

The literature suggests that the quality of the relationship between employees and their immediate managers plays a significant role in retaining staff within an organization. According to Grace-Odeleye (2020), employees are more likely to remain with an organization if they feel their managers show interest and concern for them, if they have clear expectations if their role matches their capabilities, and if they receive regular positive feedback and recognition. On the other hand, Gwavuya (2011) highlights that inadequate leadership can lead to poor employee performance, high-stress levels, low job commitment, low job satisfaction, and high intent to leave the organization. In South Africa, the management style was found to be the most prominent factor affecting retention, as indicated by research on the South African training industry (Netswera, 2005). Ogalo (2018) found in their study that the majority of employees in the surveyed organizations planned to remain with their organizations for at least the next five years due to the prevailing culture of management care. O'Neill (2018) observed that leadership behaviour has a positive influence on organizational commitment and turnover intention. Pastare, Presbitero, Roxas, and Chadee (2016) established that leadership style, specifically, a lack of involvement in decision-making and inadequate communication contributed to dissatisfaction among academic staff at the University of Nairobi. Hence, the literature emphasizes the critical importance of leadership style in retaining staff.

Institutional Climate and Staff Application ofNew Knowledge

The purpose of collecting this information was to determine the extent to which the institutional climate at Adamawa State Polytechnic, Yola, supports the application of new knowledge and skills acquired through training. The survey question posed to respondents sought their perspective on the organizational culture in terms of its encouragement of implementing new ideas acquired during training.

As shown in Table 2, 39.3% of the sample population either strongly agreed (8.5%) or agreed (30.8%) that the institutional climate fosters the application of newly acquired knowledge and skills, while 57% either disagreed (30.8%) or strongly disagreed (26.2%) with this statement. A total of 3.8% chose not to respond.Interviews with former staff members revealed that job content and financial rewards were significant factors contributing to their decision to resign from Adamawa State Polytechnic, Yola. Administrative staff reported feeling that they were not given adequate opportunities to apply the knowledge and skills they gained from development programs to their work. The following were the responses obtained from the interviews with key stakeholders.

What strategies are in place for retaining staff that attend development programmes?

According to one interviewee, the Adamawa State Polytechnic, Yola offers advantageous promotional opportunities for employees who participate in development programs. However, it is up to the staff to take advantage of such opportunities when they arise. Additionally, there is a staff development agreement in place that requires employees to remain with the Polytechnic for a specified periodbefore resigning.

A separate interviewee reported that the Adamawa State Polytechnic, Yola experiences a shortage of skilled personnel and highly qualified staff members, such as those holding Masters or PhD degrees, are in high demand. This creates challenges for the Polytechnic to retain employees who may seek better opportunities elsewhere. The financial resources of the Polytechnic may not be able to compete with those of the private sector or some public companies. Ultimately, it is up to each employee to determine whether they choose to stay or leave after fulfilling their contractual obligations.

The purpose of conducting interviews with former staff members was to determine the factors that led to their resignations from the institution. The interviews were conducted from November 3, 2022, to January 1, 2023, and their responses were recorded.

What was your reason for leaving the institution after obtaining a qualification?

According to the cited sources, the primary motivation for the departure of employees from the institution was attributed to job dissatisfaction, inadequate financial rewards, and limited career advancement opportunities. Specifically, the job content was described as not challenging. Additionally, the notch increase received after obtaining a qualification was deemed insufficient. Three members reported a lack of career progression within the institution, while six administrative members stated that they were not given opportunities to apply their skills and knowledge on the job. Furthermore, one member had obtained a qualification that was incongruent with their work, resulting in their ineligibility for a notch increase, which was a demotivating factor. In contrast, two academic members reported being provided with opportunities to teach higher-level courses.

Signing a staff development agreement

During the interview, the participants expressed their concerns regarding the signing of the contract, citing it as a disincentive. All interviewees concurred that the signing of the agreement would not serve as a motivator for them to continue their employment with the institution. Two individuals had fulfilled the full term of the contract, while others had breached the agreement and subsequently reimbursed the corresponding funds. One member noted that other companies had expressed interest in acquiring their services. Some participants opined that they would prefer to incur personal expenses rather than sign the contract. All interviewees agreed that the Adamawa State Polytechnic, Yola should implement more effective strategies to retain competent and skilled staff if it aspires to achieve competitiveness within the education sector.

In their closing remarks, former members emphasized the importance of succession planning, the provision of career paths, and the development of a staff development plan for those participating in training programs. Six of the interviewees had previously worked for the Adamawa State Polytechnic, Yola after completing their education, but they did not receive opportunities to apply their skills and knowledge. All members noted that the signing of a contract does not ensure staff retention.

The overall sentiment of the staff members was positive, as they enjoyed their employment with the Adamawa State Polytechnic, Yola and would recommend the institution to others. The staff members acknowledged that the institution had not given sufficient attention to staff development until recently and that training programs were often implemented without a clear plan for how the individual could apply the acquired skills and knowledge to benefit the Adamawa State Polytechnic, Yola.

V. DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The analysis reveals a lack of effective retention strategies in place to retain staff members at the Adamawa State Polytechnic, Yola. The findings from interviews with key personnel and ex-staff members indicate that the institution does not have any viable retention strategies, with the exception of a notch increase for staff members who attain a higher qualification. However, ex-staff members noted that the notch increase offered was not sufficient. According to the literature reviewed (Dibble, 1999), money cannot be solely relied upon as an effective motivator for retaining employees, although it can be used to retain specific employees for specific purposes. One former academic staff member stated that they had to apply for a promotion, but resigned due to the prolonged process. Ex-staff members also emphasized that signing an agreement would not guarantee their continued employment at the institution. The results presented in Table 2 show that 57% of respondents

disagree that the institutional climate enables staff to apply their new knowledge. Additionally, job content and financial rewards were cited as significant reasons for resigning from the State Polytechnic.

Limitations and Future Research

It is recommended, based on the limitations noted in the current study, that future research be conducted for the benefit of Adamawa State Polytechnic, Yola. Specifically, an investigation should be undertaken to determine the monetary value of recruitment expenses and labour turnover over the years. This is crucial, as the absence of concrete data regarding the financial impact of recruitment and labour turnover can result in a lack of appreciation for their significance by institutions and organizations.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

The attainment of the objective "to be a leading Polytechnic" is contingent upon the proficiency, competencies, and aptitudes of the personnel employed. Prospective employees will only be attracted to Adamawa State Polytechnic, Yola for training and development purposes and tend to resign once they have acquired specific certifications. To establish itself as a preferred employer, the polytechnic must retain its staff. Nevertheless, the limited funding that Adamawa State Polytechnic, Yola receives from the government may pose a challenge to the implementation of effective retention strategies. The purpose of the study was to investigate the reasons for personnel resigning from the institution after obtaining their qualifications and to examine the availability of retention strategies. Based on the findings, the researcher has provided pertinent recommendations aimed at fostering an organizational culture that supports and nurtures staff retention at Adamawa State Polytechnic, Yola. These recommendations are presented below:

The institution should develop a proper innovative retention strategy

In the education sector, acquiring and retaining competent and skilled personnel presents a significant challenge. To address this issue, the Adamawa State Polytechnic, Yola, should establish a robust and innovative retention strategy with a focus on individuals who exhibit potential and have achieved Master and Doctoral degrees through the institution's development programs. Given that staff members are now more difficult to replace than in the past, institutions must be prepared to make financial investments to retain them. The retention strategy should distinguish between administrative, support, and academic staff.

For academic staff members, the retention strategy should encompass personal and professional development opportunities, flexible working hours, and increased time for research activities. Administrative staff members, on the other hand, should be provided with opportunities for career development, challenging tasks, autonomy, and greater responsibilities. The implementation of such a strategy will serve to motivate staff members and promote their continued growth and development while encouraging them to share their newly acquired knowledge with their colleagues. In turn, retaining skilled and competent staff will facilitate effective succession planning and enhance the institution's appeal to potential employees. By adopting this recommendation, the Adamawa State Polytechnic, Yola, will be better positioned to address the challenge of staff retention and minimize staff turnover levels, thereby promoting "brain gain" rather than "brain drain".

Government should extend additional funding to institutions on an equity basis

It is recommended that the government provide equal funding to the Adamawa State Polytechnic, Yola. In addition, the allocation of such funding should be utilized to enhance the allowances provided to the institution's staff. Currently, the low salaries and inadequate allowances offered by the polytechnic are the primary reasons for staff resignation. By providing better fringe benefits, the polytechnic can incentivize staff retention and discourage them from seeking employment in the private sector. With adequate financial resources, the polytechnic can also attract competent professionals from other states and countries, thereby promoting the exchange of knowledge and expertise.For the benefit of national development, it is imperative that the government distribute funding equitably. This will not only reduce labour turnover rates but also increase international student enrollment and enhance the polytechnic's ranking. The researcher believes that the implementation of these recommendations will result in a more stable workforce and contribute to the recognition of Adamawa State Polytechnic, Yola as a reputable institution committed to delivering effective services.

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