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ACADEMIC STAFF RETENTION AS A TOOL FOR GOAL ACHIEVEMENT IN NIGERIAN PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES

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Abstract

It is often said that availability of staffis key to ensure successful implementation of organization goals and objectives. Sadly, the issue of brain drain has become a common phenomenon and is no longer news in Nigerian universities most especially in private universities. In view of the foregoing, this paper examined academic staff retention as a tool for goal achievement in private Universities. The concepts of academic staff retention, retention strategies and university goal achievement were examined. Besides, overview of private universities in Nigeria as well as academic staff retention strategies and goal achievement in the institutions were carefully examined. Also, it was discovered through the reviewed that ineffectiveness of private Universities in retaining quality academics continue to be crucial to the changing prospects and potential of knowledge formation and learning. The paper concluded that effective retention of proven and competent academics in private Universities is highly essential for achieving the stated goals. It was suggested that compensation package of academic staff in private Universities should be enhanced and made relevant to prevailing economic circumstance by reviewing them periodically. Additionally, academic staff development programmes should be accorded priority to ensure retention of competent and dedicated academics. Finally, prominence should be given to stimulating work environment to boost lecturers' morale thereby facilitating the attainment of university goal, while promotion prospect should be improved in order to enhance lecturers' sense of advancement.

Keywords: Staff Retention, Strategies, Goal Achievement, Private Universities

Introduction

University education in the contemporary period globally is vastly becoming a complex enterprise which demands for high degree of competent and proven scholars from the university academics in particular and the entire staff in general. Thus, adequate retention strategies and measures capable of making these providers of knowledge to be satisfied with their jobs must be put in place for universities to focus on their obligations of teaching, research and community engagement. It is alarming that private Universities in Nigeria are threatened by continuous brain drain and the pressure to attract and retain knowledgeable staff due to crucial but avoidable reason, especially in the 21st Century when the institutions are losing experienced academics to both developed and developing countries (Osasuli, 2014). An evaluation of private Universities in Nigeria revealed that the institutions do not seem capable of mobilizing the intellectual strengths required to retain key academic staff that are considered the hub of knowledge and affect their roles as centres for intellectual excellence (Task Force on Higher Education and Society, 2014).

Retention of workers that are considered the hub of knowledge has become a critical issue in private Universities which has raised deep concern among university managers, administrators, parents, students and relevant educational stakeholders. However, it has become a challenge for private Universities to retain well versed and motivated academic employees that are suitably qualified to work for the actualization of set goal. The Federal Ministry of Education (2013) revealed that despite the efforts made by the National Universities Commission to retain talented workforce, there is very low lecturers' retention as private Universities alone had 66.1 % of academics turnover and attrition. The National Universities Commission (2019) reported that there were 79 private Universities legally recognized in Nigeria which have formed formidable opponents rather than compatriot for State and Federal owned Universities. Yet, the institutions are still experiencing paucity of key academic staff due to brain drain syndrome. This scenario has grave implications on quality of service, institutional images, academic synergies and increase competition for talents who are already in short supply as the institutions are not only competing with one another in the retention of top academics, but also with other universities in Nigeria and abroad through incentives of various kinds.

Therefore, for any private university to take off and achieve its goals of providing the manpower requirements to advance national development, the institution must maintain competent and experienced academic staff through conducive working conditions, promotional opportunities and leadership qualities. Inappropriate retention strategies may result to poor academic delivery, erosion of core intellectual capital and high rate of turnover. This could adversely affect the overall performance of private Universities. Therefore, the need to attract, motivate and retain knowledgeable, competent and proven scholars from the University academic staff through competitive pay, stimulating work environment, job security, opportunities for promotion and progressive human resource policies which in turn enhance the goals achievement of university education cannot be undermined. This study therefore considered effective retention strategies of academic staff as a tool for goal achievement in private Universities.

Overview of Private Universities in Nigeria

The Private sector according to the outcome of a recent international survey is the fastest growing segment in higher education globally (UNESCO, 2015). The growing in number of private Universities has outstripped by far that of public Universities to the extent that the change in political scenario has been identified as an influencing factor (UNESCO, 2015). Privatization has been embraced by many countries globally as a policy to guide their educational system based on its inherent benefits. In Africa, countries like: Ghana, Guinea, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia have entranced the policy (Uweke, 2010). Recent developments in Nigeria regarding private University education have resulted to the one of the most astounding sub-sectoral growth rates ever witnessed in the country educational sector (National Universities Commission, 2015). In line with the global trend, Nigeria government has made it a priority to allow private bodies in the provision and management of tertiary level of educational system. Many issues like: increasing cases of unsatisfied demand for admission, moral decadence among students, persistent strikes, students' unrest and cultism among others have necessitated the demand for the involvement of private bodies alongside the federal and state universities in Nigeria.

The emergence of private involvement in the provision of university education in Nigeria is traceable to 1979 when the Civilian government placed education on the concurrent legislative list in the Nigerian constitution. This provision marked the genesis of the establishment of 26 private Universities (Mathew, 2013). The trend in the establishment of private Universities due to degradation in the standard of university education prompted the federal Military Government to scrap the already established private Universities and prohibited the establishment of new ones through Degree 19 of 1984. The country had a large number of public institutions, but unsatisfied demand for admission, limited and decaying infrastructural facilities, incessant strikes, students unrest and cultism, negative attitudes of lecturers, low ranking of universities, trends in globalization and fall in standard of university graduates paved way for re-birth and emergency of three private Universities: Babcock University, Madona University and Igbinedion University in 1999 (Mathew, 2013). Since then private Universities have continued to growth in number. As at August, 2018 there are 72 private Universities in Nigeria (National Universities Commission, 2018).

Meaning of Academic Staff Retention

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 (Smith & Field, 2013). Staff retention according to Chandiok (2012) is a systematic effort by employers to create and foster an environment that encourages current employees to remain on the job through policies and practices that address their diverse needs. Akila (2014) viewed academic staff retention as the process through which lecturers are encouraged to remain in university environment for the maximum period of time. The main purpose of retention is to prevent the loss of competent academics from leaving the university as it could have adverse effect on productivity and service delivery (Samuel &Chipunza, 2009). Bailey (2012) viewed academic staff retention as deliberate

efforts, policies and practices that are tailored towards increasing institutional commitment of lecturers by giving them myriad of opportunities to growth.

The issue of academic staff retention in Nigeria has been less documented in literature because it is subsumed under the general categories of brain drain (Mihyo, 2007). Indeed, the triggers identified as brain drain in general are also those behind staff retention and thus the two processes are intertwined. Tetty (2016) affirmed that most of the expertise base and qualified academics have resigned from Nigeria private Universities to secure better paying jobs elsewhere to the extent that enough teaching capacity is not available to provide quality training for new generation of citizens. Samuel (2009) noted that the main reason for retention is to prevent the loss of competent staff from leaving the institution as it could have adverse effect on university goals achievement. Therefore, appropriate understanding of staff expectations regarding the work environment becomes critical issues for the management of Private Universities in their abilities to retain academic employees.

Factors that Influence Academic Staff Retention

According to Paul and Berry (2013), higher institutions of learning often intend toholdon to their high potential staffs and replace the under-performing ones with new staff that can demonstrate strong academic ability. Besides, numerous studies have been conducted by scholars in the field of education to come up with factors that influence academic staff retention. Those factors include leadership, communication, work-life balance, organizational culture and values, self-actualization, and reward and recognition to mention a few (Sinha, 2012; Vaiman, Scullion & Collings, 2012).

Firstly, variation in staff retention is connected to the culture of the organization. Specifically, organizational culture is described as the way things are done in a particular way. It can also be seen as the pattern of beliefs, attitudes, assumptions norms, and values that may not be articulated but shape the ways in in which staff in the organization behave and ensure they get things done. In fact, it is often said that staff become energized when the culture appeals to their desire ideals and values and this is connected to the culture of the organization. Organizational commitment is seen as the relative strength of staff's identification with respect to a certain organization (Trevisan et al., 2014).

Secondly, commitment is seen as a psychological link that persons have with their organization and this characterized by the resilient identification with their organisation. Sun and Anderson (2012) affirmed that leaders in organization ideally improve employees' personal links to the company, thus enable employees to better fathom how their individual accomplishments strongly contribute to the overall success of the organization where they work. Kinicki and Fugate (2012) averred that employees' pledge is likely to be improved if they are well incorporated into the organisation and carefully identify with the culture.

Thirdly, the values of individual staff influence their behaviours, attitude, norms, beliefs, and the decisions they make at the workplace (Sinha, 2012). Similarly, research indicates that staffs identify with the values and norms of the organisation and trust them to be comparable to their own; they are more likely to retain their services with the organization where they work. In the same vein, it is common amongst staff to achieve a certain level of self-actualization because

staff needs to feel that they remain competitive, learning, and advancing that will lead them to opportunities for promotion as well as career advancement (Gupta & Tayal, 2013).

Fourthly, there is assurance that if staff do not enjoy or feel competitive as enjoyed by their peers, there is high tendency that discovering of new jobs outside the organization where they work will surface, while leadership is described as a fundamental way of retaining quality staff that will reflect the organization's objectives because the organization basically function through managers who exercise leadership traits for them to get their staff into action and confirm that they accomplish the anticipated results (Kaiser & Hogan, 2010).

Concept of University Goal Achievement

Universities are identified as critical engine for socio- cultural and political development. They have become primary locus for innovation and expanding the pool of high caliber manpower to address the challenges of underdevelopment. Education in Nigeria is regarded as an instrument for national development and integration. Accordingly, the Federal Government of Nigeria through the National Policy on Education (2013) clearly identified the overall philosophy for the establishment of Universities in Nigeria as teaching, research and publication and public services. The NPE document among others charged Nigerian universities with universal goals which expected to be relevant, excellent and qualitative for the development of Nigerian nation. Madume (2016) argued that the highest institutional mechanism for recreating and making organized investments towards human capital and manpower development is the university. Interestingly, academic staff constitutes the group of human resources in the university system through which the goals are translated in to objectives for implementation and actualization.

University Goal Achievement is in line with the National Policy on Education that focuses on the ultimate goal of Nigerian Universities which are teaching, research and publication and public services. This agreed with Patric (2004) who affirmed that universities have three fundamental universally accepted goals of transmitting, extending and applying knowledge respectively. The teaching goal is dominantly influence by the student body, the academia and the curriculum through the transmission of organized body of knowledge to the students; develop the power of critical judgment and renewal mechanism central to identity of universities on the basis of their invented corporate identities as a major goal. Okebuola (2012) substantiated that teaching remain the foremost and core goal of university education globally. This is why the National Universities Commission (NUC) accreditation programme principally centred on teaching and learning programmes offered by Nigerian universities as spelt out in section 5, clause 33 (1) and (38) of the NUC.

The goal of research and innovation as inherent in the nature of universities is that of creating, broadening, guarding and preserving cultures, values, wisdom and knowledge from one generation to another. The highest form of teaching is being practised in universities by research scholars based on their enthusiasm for discovery in to the classroom, probe for intellectual curiosity in every student and guide in those direction towards civilized fulfillment (Volke, 2014). The Nigerian government regards the realization of this university goal as core to the achievement of national development. Consequently, the National Universities Commission and National Educational Research and Development Council are required to identify and prioritize areas needed to be researched.

Pursuit of public service as the third goal of university focused on serving the public with intellectual, professional, technical and executive values. They continuously struggle to adapt to the changing roles and goals of its audience, the external community has continued to urge upon its new functions and variety of objectives. Okoye (2013) emphasized that university ultimate public service is the development of individual who are prepared to help in solving society problems, articulate new needs and develop new dimensions of learning. Key units of universities through which public services are rendered in Nigeria include: Centre for Continuing Education, University Teaching Hospitals and Health Services Department, Sandwich and Part Time Programme at both undergraduate and post graduate levels and Constituency Service Units.

Strategies for Academic Staff Retention

The strategies for retaining academic staff in private Universities include:

(a) 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. Rosser (2010) 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. The findings of Kipkebut (2010) revealed that 65 percent of academic staff in private Universities never believed that they are being compensated fairly, relative to others in comparable institutions. 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.Prompt payment of salary goes a long way in enhancing the viability and dedication of employees towards the realization of organizational mission and vision. Casico (2008) affirmed that lecturers who do not believed that they are being compensated equitably for their works take action to remedy the inequity by leaving the profession. Thus, if employees felt that they are inadequately rewarded, it is often likely that they will quit and replacement may be costly or in most cases not readily available.

(b) Training opportunities: training 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, 2014). 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 & Purcell, 2003). Tetty (2012) observed that training opportunities is the engine that keep the universities true to their mandates as centre of ideas and innovation. Intellectual capital would remain stagnant and the relevance of universities to society may diminish without effort in this direction. Therefore, training and career development programmes restrict academic staff from leaving the university, increase loyalty and enhance professional competency there by facilitating the actualization of university goals. Stressing the need of capacity buildings for academic improvement, Oyewole (2014) emphasized that management of private Universities see carrier training and development programmes of lecturers as integral parts of academics development in an effort to ensure the realization of set goal. Sallem, Saheed and Nassem (2014) affirmed that staff retention and employees productivity enhanced through training and development programmes that equipped them with the skills needed for effective service delivery. There is no doubt that academic staff training and carrier development programme increase the morale of academics and influence their turnover decision.

(c) Working Conditions: this is the way in which organizational members perceived and characterized their climate in an attitudinal and value based manner (Verbeke, 2008). Pleasant working conditions reduces academic turnover and induce lower degree of job stress Jone (2008) 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 university goal. 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 (2007) revealed that provision for supportive learning and working climate are crucial for the retention of talented universities academics. Equally, the safety, conducive and hygienic nature of the environment in which lecturers operates has a significant impact on academics retention in private Universities. Supporting this assertion, Casper (2014) affirmed that favourable organizational climate plays a pivotal role in attracting qualified and knowledgeable academics. Employees appreciate friendly and responsive workplace with support for innovation (Shina, 2012). Graham (2013) identified work environment as the most significant determinant of employees' decision to remain or leave the university sector. A study on academic staff in Bangladesh Private Universities (2005) revealed that working conditions is the prime indicator of retention of lecturers among academic members of the institutions. Therefore, healthy work environment influence academic staff retention

(d) Promotional Opportunities: this is an advancement of an employee in the hierarchy of an organization from a particular level to a higher level. Dessler (2005) defined promotion as a shift in the upward direction in the organizational hierarchy that adds more responsibilities, prestige, status and increased salaries and allowances. Elevation of staff to higher status after satisfying the pre requisite conditions is fundamental to academic employees' retention and sustainability. Souza (2012) 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. Substantiating this view, Tetty (2016) established that promotional procedures in African Universities were long stressful, cumbersome and the requirements are unreasonable especially the possession of a doctorate as a prerequisite for promotion beyond the position of a lecturer. Theobald (2009) affirmed that to retain academic staff in the university system, the institution management must create room for carrier advancement opportunities; failure to do so may result to brain drain of experienced and seasoned lecturers. Ibrahim (2009) asserted that enthusiasm and willingness of lectures to work towards the actualization of institutional goals depend on the consistency and persistency of promotional exercise.

Academic Staff Retention as a Tool for Goal Achievement in Private Universities

The need for effective retention of talents with critical skills is globally acknowledged by educational institutions as vital for the achievement of institutional goals. Universities are operating in highly competitive environment and the needs for the institutions to retain their qualified, competent and experienced academic staff cannot be overemphasized if the desired goals are to be actualized. Universities by their unique nature serve as storehouse for knowledge and only few institutions can afford to employ, train and allow their most value and talented academic staff to leave when it is difficult to find better replacement (Netswera, 2005). The main

reason for retention is to prevent competent employees from leaving the institution as it could have severe effect on productivity and service quality. Babakuse (2008) corroborated that the turnover of competent academic employees make it very difficult for private Universities to immediately fill the vacant positions and maintain high institutional performance.

Compensation as the pay provided by an employer to employees for the services rendered plays a vital role in fulfilling job requirement, employees' productivity and organizational effectiveness. Adeoye (2014) maintained that employees demonstrate pleasurable attitude when they are satisfied with their pay system thereby increasing productivity and overall organizational performance. When academic staff pay package is appropriate, reasonable and competitive to their colleagues in the same domain, they will be financially empowered to provide basic necessities for their families. Consequently, this could energize them to develop cordiality in the performance of their pedagogical tasks in a way that institutional goal will be achieved. Securing and retaining skilled academic employees play vital role in university education and central to the realization of university goal. Therefore, the importance of retaining valuable academics for the survival of universities cannot be overemphasized as a strong determinant for the actualization of institutional goal. The more knowledgeable the employees learn, the higher they meet the global challenges of university system.

To increase efficiency, effectiveness, productivity and job commitment of employees, the university management must satisfy the needs of its staff by providing stimulating academic environment. Alkin (2012) posited that university lecturers need a work environment that allows them to work pleasurably in order to fully maximize their potentials to achieve the mission and vision of university education. Chandler (2011) argued that the institution needs to pay attention to create a work environment which enhances the ability of staff to become productive thereby improve the overall performance. Promotion or advancement to positions of increased responsibilities is a vital aspect academic staff retention that facilitates the achievement of university goal. Promotional opportunities are a contributing factor of academic staff retention towards delivering quality education service, university sustainability and goal achievement. When academic staff receive timely promotion and optimistic of promotion opportunities in future, they become enthusiastic towards the realization of university mandates. Employees feel more recognized, fulfilled and committed to the achievement of organization goal if there are being promoted timely and fairly (Chew, 2012).

Conclusion

It can be said that the paucity of academic staff and ineffectiveness of private Universities in retaining quality academics continue to be crucial to the changing prospect and potential of knowledge formation and learning. Thus, effective retention of proven and competent academics in private universities is highly essential for achieving the stated goals. The strategies that can be used to ensure retention of academic staff includes improved compensation package, good working condition, training opportunities and promotional opportunities.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made so as to ensure that the goal of of private universities in Nigeria is achieved:

1. The compensation package of academic staff in private Universities should be enhanced and made relevant to prevailing economic circumstance by reviewing them periodically.
2. Academic staff development programmes should be accorded priority to ensure retention of competent and dedicated academics.
3. Prominence should be given to stimulating work environment to boost lecturers morale thereby facilitating the attainment of university goal.
4. Promotion prospect should be improved in order to enhance academic staff sense of advancement.

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