

# Effectiveness and Preference of Recognition Strategies for Academic Staff Retention among Selected Private Higher Learning Institutions in Tanzania

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**Abstract:** This study sought to establish effectiveness and preference of recognition strategies for academic staff retention among selected private higher learning institutions in Tanzania. The study used the descriptive research design. Out of the population of 180 potential participants, 132 were sampled and only 119 filled a questionnaire and a few were interviewed. Data was treated through descriptive statistics and thematic approach. The study concludes that members of the academic staff are interested being recognized by their employers even through informal and low cost methods. Therefore, the study recommends that each private HLIs in Tanzania considers formulating policies that take into account recognition strategies for retention of its members of academic staff. Some of these strategies could be sponsoring long training and career development opportunities. This will motivate the academic staff to stay and attract new comers to join.

**Keywords:** Academic staff retention; recognition strategies; higher learning institutions.

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## Introduction

Retaining well-motivated academic staff is important for any higher learning institutions (HLIs) that must thrive. This is because motivated staff will attract quality services, increase output and enhance the institutional productivity. Huselid (1995) argues that an organization with attractive retention strategies and practices can reduce recruitment costs associated with high staff turnover, which will enhance productivity and performance. Whillans (2019) argues that employee recognition is the timely, informal, or formal acknowledgement of a person's or team's behavior, efforts or business result that supports the

organization's goals and values and which has clearly been beyond normal expectations. According to Kyeremeh and Amoetema (2016), there are three types of employee recognition programs: formal recognition, informal recognition and everyday recognition.

Formal recognition consists of structured recognition programs with clearly defined objectives, processes and criteria linked to rewarding and recognizing individuals, teams or departments at the company level for achieving specific business targets. Informal recognition focuses primarily on the performance achievements, goal accomplishments and other milestones by individuals or teams that

may occur monthly or quarterly. It may include low-cost awards, refreshments, point-value incentives, gift cards and certificates. Informal recognition programs have been identified to point out employee's value and contribution at the right moment because of its instantaneous nature and the continuous changing work environment.

Day-to-day recognition is a type of recognition practices that are frequent (daily or weekly) with low or no cost, often intangible and often reliant on interpersonal skills for positive feedback that can be given to all employees. The day-to-day recognition brings the benefit of immediate and powerful reinforcement of desired behavior and sets an example to other employees of desired behavior that aligns with organizational objectives. Employees respond to appreciation expressed through recognition of their good work because it means that their work is valued by others. When employees and their work are valued, their satisfaction and productivity rise and they are motivated to maintain or improve their good work. Kyeremeh and Amoetema (2016) argued that many organizations are increasingly making use of employee recognition to motivate the employees to achieve higher performance and productivity.

It is also reported that turnover or losing critical employees is largely costly to any organizations (Chiboowa, 2009). For that reason, most organizations in the modern world are strategizing to institute the effective ways that would promote retention of employees by considering the organizational goals. However, it is reported that the problem of academic staff retention is a global challenge that affects both developing and the industrialized countries (Tettey, 2006). For example, a survey of full-time faculty members in the US in 2000 showed that more than 40% of them had contemplated changing careers. In a study carried out in Australian higher education institutions, 68% of the academic personnel indicated that they wished to leave higher education (Ng'ethe et al., 2012).

The situation in many African countries appears to be particularly urgent (Tettey, 2006). In South African higher education institutions, the problem of staff retention is evident as the available data indicates that a substantial number (between 5% and 18%) of academics leave higher education institutions (Ng'ethe, 2013) reported that staff retention in African countries was a challenge due

to poor remuneration, poor working conditions and as a result, it recommended development of alternative sources of income to supplement inadequate salaries. It is reported that although public universities have developed alternative sources of funds, such as self-sponsored programs, the effect seems not to have reached academic staff as a significant number of staff continues to quit in search for better working conditions (Ng'ethe, 2013).

It is reported that although public universities have developed alternative sources of funds, such as the self-sponsored programs, the effect seem not to have reached academic staff in private universities as a significant number of staff in private HLLs continues to quit job in search of better working conditions (Ng'ethe et al., 2012).

In response to privatization policy, in 1996, private HLLs in Tanzania started to emerge and this caused a significant expansion of higher education in the country. As the public awareness on the importance of education to socio-economic development increased, even the more enhanced demand for higher education access in the country emerged (Tanzania Commission for Universities, 2020). Consequently, there occurred a rapid expansion of higher education through the establishment of more universities, both public and private. This correspondingly led to a more than 15-fold rise in the national higher education gross enrolment rate from 0.27% in 1997 to more than 4 per cent in 2016 (Tanzania Commission for Universities, 2020). In regulating the quality of higher education in Tanzania, TCU directs the universities to make sure they follow staff-student ratio. Section 1.6 of TCU standards and guidelines for universities of 2020 states,

Every University shall maintain a student population that makes it a viable and sustainable institution, while adhering to the maximum student/staff ratio and academic and technical staff disposition set by the Commission. Every University shall maintain a staff/student ratio and academic and technical staff disposition levels....

According to TCU, the maximum staff-student ratio for conventional universities for Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities is 1:50; For Science and Technology it is 1:30; For Health Science it is 1:25; For Health Science (Clinical Sciences) it is 1:10 and for

engineering it is 1:25. Despite the guidelines provided by Tanzania Commission of Universities (TCU), staff-student ratio continued to be critically high in Private universities.

Besides the over workload that members of academic staff faced, the influences of globalization and the increased mobility of highly skilled academic staff, most Private HLI still depended on the locally available academics for sustainability of the programs taught. Strategies used by private higher learning institutions to retain the qualified academic members of staff were not clearly known. In this way, it was important to explore specific strategies for retention of the academic staff in private higher learning institutions in Tanzania.

## Literature Review

This section provides Literature Review related to the study. It begins with explaining the theory employed in this study, followed by literature analysis of relevant studies in the context of strategies for retaining academic staff in HLIs global, regional and Tanzania.

### Theoretical Underpinnings

This study adopted the two – factor theory, which was pioneered by Herzberg et al. (1954). Two-factor theory postulates that there are factors, which cause job satisfaction and those which cause job dissatisfaction at the workplace. According to this theory, factors that cause job satisfaction, also known as *true motivators*, are intrinsic to workplace. They include, achievements, recognition, challenging tasks, delegation of power and authority through responsibility, freedom and control during execution of tasks and duties (Armstrong, 1981). Factors causing dissatisfaction, which are also known as hygienic factors, mainly result from non-job-related variables that are called *extrinsic variables* (Ng'ethe, 2013). These variables are salary/pay, co-worker relationships, company policies, supervisory or management style and work environment (Mkulu, 2018).

According to Two-factor Theory, it is argued that employees are motivated by internal values rather than values that are external to the work job. In other words, remaining to the work is internally motivated and propelled by variables that are intrinsic to the work. When someone is internally satisfied, it is not easy to quit the job (Said, 2003). The two-factor theory was selected because it is relevant to the present study problem. It means that

if employers in private HLIs in Tanzania do not strategies by giving various recognitions to the excelling academic staff to retain them, the rate of staff turnover will be high and vice versa.

### Empirical Literature Review

Studies have shown that retention of academic staff is critical in higher learning institutions in many countries. Masum et al. (2015) in Bangladesh found that compensation package, supervisory support, job security, training and development opportunities, team cohesion, career growth, working conditions, organizational culture and policies were positively associated with the academics' retention. Although it is still debatable, but a good pay was the main strategy used by employers to reduce a high rate of the staff turnover.

Chevandire (2019) studied determinants of academic staff retention in two HLIs in Metabeleland Regions of Zimbabwe, aiming to establish whether demographic factors (age, sex and marital status), remuneration, career advancement opportunities, training development, educational development and amount of workload had an influence on the academic staff retention. The study revealed that marital status, education level, training and development, workload, remuneration and career advancement opportunities significantly affected the academic staff retention. Age and sex had no significant effect on the academic staff retention. The implication of this study's findings is that the retention of academic staff is influenced by Universities' arrangements rather than personal factors as age and sex.

Muhoho (2014) found that 70% of the Tanzanian employees considered quitting once in their organizations. The study reveals that to pursue other career goals is the primary reason for Tanzanian employees leaving from one organization to another. The study also shows that low salaries and benefits were the main reasons for leaving. Furthermore, the employer psychological factors, including organizational justice and prestige were main motives for the employees' retention.

Mkude (2011) revealed that the problem of turnover in public universities was too low compared with private universities. The public universities experienced many problems associated with staff job dissatisfaction. While Mkude's study closely relate with present study in areas such as

turnover in private HLIs and satisfaction of academic staff, yet it does not address the question of recognition strategies for retention of academic staff in private HLIs. Although a few studies were conducted in Tanzania relating to retention strategies of academic staff (Nnko, 2014; Muhoho, 2014; Ng'ethe, 2013; Tettey, 2010; and Mkude, 2011), little is known on the effect of recognition on retention of academic staff in private HLIs. This study sought to fill the gap.

## Methodology

### Design

This study adopted the descriptive research design to find data that conform to the research objectives and questions. Descriptive research does not fit neatly into the definition of either quantitative or qualitative research methodologies. Instead, it can utilize elements of both, often within the same

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + Ne^2}$$

$$n = \frac{180}{1 + 180 \times 0.045^2} \quad n = 131.9$$

$$n = 132$$

Where n = sample size, N = population and e = sampling error (99.55%).

study (Amos, 2023). The term descriptive research refers to the type of research question, design and data analysis applied to a given topic. It involves gathering data, describing events and organizing, tabulating, depicting and describing the data. It often uses visual aids, such as graphs and charts to help the reader understand the results.

### Population and sampling

The population in this study was the total number of employees in the three institutions, which is 180 employees at the time of this study. The sample of 132 participants was a reasonable as it was in line with normal distribution characteristics of being unbiased, sufficient and effective. Therefore, the study involved 132 respondents as indicated in Table 1, based on strata, using the following formula (Dapzury (2004):

**Table 1: Population and Sampling**

Category	Respondents Per university	Total number of expected respondents	Sampling technique employed to select respondents
Permanent and contractual employed academic staff	30 from each university	90	Random sampling
Management: top 3 management leaders, senate and council members and deans of faculties.	6 from each university	18	Purposive sampling and random sampling
Academic staff who left their jobs from 2013 – 2016)	8 from each university	24	Random sampling
<b>Total</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>132</b>	

The study used a questionnaire and an interview schedule as sources of data. While 13 potential participants did not fill the questionnaire, only 119 filled the questionnaire and some were interviewed.

### Validity and Reliability

In this study, validity was ensured by making sure that no falsification or unnecessary modifications of data existed. Correct scholarly citations were adhered to as per academic report writing

conventions during the data presentation, analysis, interpretation and discussion of findings as per each study objective. Reliability was enhanced through the use of data triangulation.

### Statistical Treatment of Data

Data was processed, coded, classified and tabulated to omit irrelevant information; responses were checked to see if they match with respective questions. In this way, descriptive statistical means

were used to present data to enable proper interpretation and inferences. Qualitative data was analysed thematically. In this way, participant's quotes were used as evidence to justify themes.

### Ethical Considerations

This study protected principles of research ethics by obtaining study permissions from the Directorate of Postgraduate Studies, Open University of Tanzania. One of the researchers presented herself to the universities, to the VCs' offices before going to the field. The VCs' secretaries directed the researcher to the DVCs' academics for further procedures. The DVCs Academics of ZU and SUMAIT allowed the researcher to see Deans of faculty and SEKOMU to see the Human resource manager for distributing the questionnaire and conducting interviews. Within the ZU and SUMAIT, Islamic culture was adhered to by wearing hijab and not shaking hands with men respondents. Before interview sessions, respondents were exposed to the objective of the study. They were also informed of their freedom to withdraw at any time they felt inconvenienced and, in such case, any data collected about them would not be used.

### Findings and Discussion

This section presents findings of the study using descriptive statistics as well as qualitative analysis

procedures. The analysis was guided by specific research questions.

**Research Question 1:** What is the effectiveness of recognition aspects for retention of academic staff in Tanzanian private HLIs?

Table 2 indicates that the majority of the respondents agreed with the first four items in the table. Particularly, they agreed that recognition methods are effective for retention (74.8%). They also agreed that academic staff are rewarded through money (61.3%), that academic staff are rewarded through letters of appreciation (61.3%) and that academic staff' efforts are recognized by their employers (56.3%). This implies that respondents considered the listed recognition methods as effective in retaining the academic staff. Money rewards and letters of appreciation were commonly used methods by the private HLIs management in recognizing their academic staff. Employee recognition letters are simply a message sent to an employee that expresses appreciation for their achievements, efforts, contributions or any other positive behaviors. Appreciation letter is a meaningful and impactful way for employer to show appreciation to the employees for their commendable work (Roller, 2024).

**Table 2: Effectiveness of Recognition for Academic staff Retention**

SN	Items	Agree		Disagree		Undecided		Total
		f	%	f	%	f	%	
1	Recognition methods are effective for retention	89	74.8	30	25.2	0	0	119
2	Academic staff are rewarded through money	73	61.3	42	35.3	4	3.4	119
3	Academic staff are rewarded through letter of appreciation	73	61.3	42	35.3	4	3.4	119
4	Academic staff' efforts are recognized by their employers	67	56.3	48	40.3	4	3.4	119
5	Academic staff are rewarded through certificate of appreciation	58	48.7	51	42.9	10	8.4	119

Dewar (2024) argues that recognition letters inspire and encourage employees to remain. They let workers know that they are valued by their employers and that dedication to their jobs and to their companies has not gone unnoticed. A recognition letter serves as a morale booster that can positively affect the employees' overall performance and loyalty. Giving small bonuses when an employee achieves a goal or shows a high level of performance can help create an environment of spontaneous motivation. Seasonal bonuses and monetary rewards, such as

commissions, also show appreciation and value of an employee's work.

The findings are consistent with Whillans (2019), who reported that praise and recognition are essential in the workplace for retention of employees since people crave respect and value from others when they think they have contributed to the institutions.

However, while close to a half of the respondents (48.7%) agreed that academic staff are rewarded through certificates of appreciation, slightly lower

number of respondents (42.9%) disagreed and 8.4% were undecided. This implies that the offering of certificates of recognition has not been effective in attracting the academic staff members. Distributing appreciation certificates is a tangible way to recognize and celebrate hard work and dedication, lifting spirits and injecting a dose of motivation into the workplace (Nonhlanhla et al., 2015). Therefore, there is a need for the institutions to use certificates of appreciation as motivational strategies to their academic staff.

During the oral interview, academic staff complained about limited financial packages and absence of such financial benefits as leave allowance, which were given to foreign academic staff only. Treating the academic staff differently through paying different packages, such transport allowance and leave allowances between local and foreign members created a sense of local employees feeling not being valued. One respondent, for instance, reported, "We do similar duties, why does the management pay different scales between us local staff and our colleague foreigners?" TCU, in its Handbook for Standards and Guidelines for

University Education in Tanzania (2019), insists that every university shall establish clear policies and procedures ensuring equal opportunity, gender equality, and equity in staff recruitment, retention and promotion, based on the consideration of qualifications, competence and skills. Therefore, there is a need for the institutions to find ways of recognizing both local and foreign employees through monetary rewards which Tetey (2006) and Ng'ethe (2013) consider as a powerful motivation factor in retention of employees.

**Research Question 2:** What is the preferred recognition strategies among the academic staff in Tanzanian private HLIs?

Respondents from the three studied universities were asked about preferred recognition strategies for retention. Responses appear in Table 3 where a bigger portion of respondents (36.1%) preferred letters of appreciation as retention strategy while 33.6% preferred attractive salary and benefits, 19.3% preferred timely payment while 10.9% preferred certificates of appreciation.

**Table 3: Preferred Recognition Strategies**

SN	Preferred Recognition Strategy	f	%
1	Letter of appreciation	43	36.1
2	Salary and Benefits	40	33.6
3	Timely payment	23	19.3
4	Certificates of appreciation	13	10.9
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>119</b>	<b>100</b>

The results show that letter of appreciation was the most preferred strategy while certificates of appreciation were the least preferred strategy. This suggests that the use of multiple motivational strategies can support the retention of employees. In the study of Huselid (1995), some of the retention strategies used by private HLIs include free house/allowance, free-child education programs, sponsorship for further studies, free health care services and allowances/free transportation to workplace.

### Conclusion s and Recommendations

This study concludes that members of the academic staff are interested being recognized by their employers even through informal and low cost methods. These can be financial or non-financial incentives. Therefore, the study recommends that each private HLIs in Tanzania considers formulating policies that take into account recognition strategies for retention of its members of academic staff.

Some of these strategies could be sponsoring long training and career development opportunities. This will motivate the academic staff to stay and attract new comers to join. Each university should consider letters of appreciation as potential recognition strategy. Furthermore, the institutions can arrange regular official events for praising good achievers. They can also use national events to appraise best workers.

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