



Staff Turnover in Public Universities in Uganda

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Abstract. In this study, we examined three sets of antecedents of staff turnover in public universities in Uganda: demographic, controllable and uncontrollable. Data were collected from lecturers and administrators at the universities. Our findings suggest that the extent of controllable turnover is greater than uncontrollable turnover and that poor management practices are the major cause of employee turnover. Poor motivation was reported to be a major problem. In particular, economic incentives were found to be grossly inadequate to retain lecturers in the university system. Therefore, it is recommended that the universities upgrade their incentive systems, especially the economic motivators. The study also revealed that there is a pressing need to make the lecturers working environment conducive for the universities core functions of teaching, research and community engagement.

Keywords: Human resource management; Attrition; Quality assurance.

1 Introduction

This paper examines the state of staff turnover in three Public Universities in Uganda, namely, Kyambogo University, Makerere University (MAK) and Mbarara University of Science and Technology (MUST). The high rate at which university lecturers quit their jobs is one of the problems facing public universities in Uganda. Many scholars (e.g. Kasozi, 2005; Mamdani, 2007) attribute the genesis of the problem to Amin's regime of 1971 to 1979. Amin's regime plunged the country into a dictatorship, economic ruin and depredation. The Asians who controlled the economy were expelled in 1972 and the British, Americans and other Western expatriates who were the core cadre lecturers and researchers at Makerere University, in Research Institutes and other tertiary institutions were forced to leave the country. During the 1970s, public servants especially university lecturers, primary and secondary school teachers in

Uganda were subjected to meagre salaries and were pauperized. There was insecurity and direct persecution of the educated by the ruling military group which was largely illiterate and not interested in education (Kasozi, 2003). University lecturers left the country in large numbers to escape insecurity and persecution and to search for greener pastures.

The long period of military rule and general mismanagement of the economy from 1971 to 1979 and the post-Amin civil wars and instability of the early 1980's represent the sad phase in the country's educational development during which the higher educational institutions lost integrity, credibility and professionalism (Musisi & Muwanga, 2003) Staff and students were isolated from international scholarship and purchase of up-to-date books and subscription for scholarly journals was drastically reduced because of lack of foreign exchange and university lecturers lost morale and self-esteem. University academics that could not endure and persevere were driven by the hustle to survive by becoming taxi drivers, primary and secondary school teachers and vendors or resorted to venality, corruption, smuggling, opportunism or other forms of undignified behaviour and hence deepening the level of intellectual erosion and mediocrity (Sessanga & Garret, 2005).

The study was based on the Theory of Work Adjustment (Dawis & Lofquist, 1991). This theory suggests that work environment and employees interact to meet each other's requirements and this interaction is called environment-personality correspondence. The interaction (environment-personality correspondence) should be maintained if a long lasting employment relationship between the employer and the employee is to be achieved. Employees are more satisfied by jobs that meet their needs and they can retain such jobs longer when they are satisfied and are performing well (Rosser, 2004, Musisi & Ngobi, 2005). The more closely a person's abilities (skills, knowledge, experience, attitude, behaviours, correspond with the requirements of the role or the organisation, the more likely it is that they will perform the job well and be perceived as satisfactory by the employer. Similarly, the more closely the rewards of the role or organisation correspond to the values that a person seeks to satisfy through their work, the more likely it is that the person will perceive the job as satisfying. Basing on this argument, this study proposed that labour turnover in public universities in Uganda is influenced by demographic, controllable and uncontrollable factors.

2 Related Literature

Labour turnover is the flow of manpower into and out of an organization (Price, 2001). The inflow of manpower is referred to as accession and the outflow as separation (leaving). Separation may be in the form of quits, discharges, lay-

offs, retirement, leaves of absence and even death. Accession on the other hand has to do with replacements and new hires. Tetey (2006b) argues that Labour turnover is one of the unorganized form of industrial conflict. However, Mutume (2003) and Mihyo (2007) concur that labour turnover is a retreat by employees usually from unsatisfactory situations. However, Naris & Ukpere (2010) contend that other factors (i.e. that is age of the worker, chances of obtaining another job) influence turnover.

In Uganda, the significance of human resources in university activities is emphasized by *The Report of Visitation Committee to Public Universities* (2007). The report brings out the fact that the academic staff who are highly qualified professionals of high intellectual calibre and integrity who have the capacity to master the best tools and practices in the world of teaching research and community service are not satisfied with their remuneration and working conditions. This is corroborated by Businge (2004) and Amutuhair (2010) concur that staff turnover is a very big problem in African universities and agree that without adequate lecturers; no university can ably fulfil its cardinal mandate of teaching, carrying out research and extending community outreach.

Samuel and Chipunza (2009) contend that there is a positive relationship between human resources and survival of universities. This is in tandem with the research done by the World Bank (2000) which it was found out that the cornerstone of excellence of a university is the ability to attract and keep outstanding members of the faculty. Therefore, failure to handsomely remunerate lecturers and provide good working conditions results into loss of staff, often the most talented, to non-university employment and the so called green pastures abroad. Kasozi (2003) and Sutherland (2004) and Musisi and Ngobi (2005) agree that a first class university consists of first class academic staff that diligently perform their duties of teaching and research and understand the vision and mission for which their institution exists and agree to implement its mission. A good university leader should be judged by the ability to recruit and retain brilliant academic staff for the university.

The staff turnover problem in Ugandan public universities is highlighted by Musisi and Muwanga (2003) and Businge (2008) who correctly observe that unless the conditions of university lecturers are improved, and their status and esteem raised higher, academic staff in public universities in Uganda shall continue to be unstable and higher educational progress shall continue to be retarded. Sawyerr (2002), Mwadiani & Akpotu (2002) and Zeleza (2004) complement the assertion with the Nigerian experience that the university faculty in Africa are underpaid, demoralized and overworked. It was found out that the Nigerian experience directly matches with the Ugandan situation according to findings of the National Council for Higher Education-NCHE (2014), Ugandan public universities was found to be understaffed and lacked well qualified staff in all departments and that Kyambogo University then had

no full academic professor but four associate professors as the highest trained academic staff. The report found out that by the year 2007, only 25 lecturers in that university had doctorates; ironically a minimum requirement for a lecturer is the level of a doctorate.

The shortage of academic staff is not helped by the young graduates shunning university teaching jobs. Tetey (2009) carried out a study in the universities of Botswana, Ghana, Ibadan, KwaZulu-Natal and Makerere and found out that young graduates did not like joining universities as lecturers because of the unattractiveness of the academic jobs, unappealing salaries and the poor working conditions. Therefore, not choosing the academic career means that the existing stock of academics is not replenished at a rate capable of sustaining their operations at optimal levels. This damaging consequence of the current university crisis according to Marks (2003), Egbule (2003) and Daly & Dee (2006) is the enormous loss of human capacity through immigration of young lecturers to Europe and North America Mutume (2003) and Polgreen (2007) opine that Africa suffers from a serious brain drain that has deprived it of thousands of highly trained people The *Report of Visitation Committee to Public Universities* (2007) highlights the exodus of academics for better pay and good working conditions abroad and blames the phenomenon on the poor salaries paid to academic staff and poor working conditions in the country which is an irony because public universities belong to government and lecturers are government workers. Equally Budree (2005), Ahemba (2006) and Mamdani (2007) postulate that the erosion of the real value of public sector salaries makes it impossible for many university staff members to survive without any other sources of income. Universities all over Africa have witnessed a series of industrial conflicts over the failure of the employers to review their remuneration and improve the conditions of service. There is direct encroachment upon the power and authority of the university council as well as internal day-to-day administration of universities through Government directives

The quality of any university depends on the quantity and quality of its faculty. Public universities in Uganda face a perennial flight of lecturers to other jobs and greener pastures abroad. Unfortunately, according to the *Report of the Visitation Committee to Public Universities* (2007), Businge (2008), Amutuhaire (2010)) and the report by the Ugandan National Council for Higher Education (NCHE (2014), there is a serious shortage of teaching staff in public universities in Uganda due to serious turnover by junior and senior staff moving to other organisations and for greener pastures abroad. Notwithstanding the fact that various scholars have pointed out that staff turnover is a very serious problem in public universities, these scholars have not invested enough to investigate the antecedents and unless the problem is sorted, Uganda

universities will not produce quality higher education and graduates fit for the 21st century labour market.

The general objective of this study, therefore, was to examine the effects of motivational factors on labour turnover among lecturers in the public universities.

3 Methodology

The research design for this study was the Ex-post facto research which is a systematic empirical inquiry where there is no direct control of independent variables because their manifestations had already occurred and are inherently not manipulated by the researcher. The research was based on a scientific and analytical examination of dependent and independent variables studied in retrospect for seeking possible and plausible relations and the likely effects that the changes in independent variables produce on a single or a set of dependent variables.

Both primary and secondary data were employed for the study. The primary data were obtained through structured and pre-tested questionnaire administered on respondents between January 2014 and 2015. Secondary information was obtained from books, Journals, annual reports, bulletins on university management, newspaper extracts, government publications and previous related research reports.

The population consisted the seven public universities then that is; Makerere University (MAK), Mbarara University of Science and Technology (MUST), Kyambogo University (KYU), Gulu University (GU), Muni University (MUN), Busitema University (BUS) and Kabale University (KAB).

The study sample consisted of lecturers in the two oldest universities that were selected that is; Makerere University (MAK) and Mbarara University of science and Technology (MUST). For purpose of the study, Makerere University and Mbarara University were selected as a representation of the public universities in the country because they are the oldest with all the necessary structures and human resource establishments Specifically Makerere University was established in 1922 and Mbarara University established in 1989.

4 Findings, Discussion and Conclusions

The study was guided by two objectives which were to determine the level of turnover at Universities and the various motivational strategies adopted to retain the academic staff in the institutions and the results were analysed both qualitatively and quantitatively. The study began by inquiring whether the

respondents believed that there was labour turnover at the Universities. The results are indicated in Table 1.

Table 1: Distribution of Participants by Level of Agreement that they Leave University Work for *Greener Pastures*

Scale	Frequency	Percentage
strongly agree	59	41.0
Agree	56	38.9
Neutral	8	5.6
Disagree	9	6.2
Strongly disagree	12	8.3
Total	144	100.0
Total	153	

As can be observed from Table 1, majority of the respondents agreed that there was staff turnover. This is indicated by 39% who strongly agreed, 37% agreed while 5% were neutrals compared to 6% who disagreed and only 8% who strongly disagreed. Even during interviews with Lecturers, it was highlighted that labour turnover was one of the main challenges facing Public universities in Uganda.

Labour turnover, that is; attrition of staff here is a reality. The Government has failed to realise the value of Lecturers at different levels and whenever Lecturers get a good jobs elsewhere, they leave mainly because of poor remuneration and bad working conditions such as inadequate housing, poor infrastructure and lack of overtime allowances. Some Lecturers leave to other organizations which pay better and others to foreign countries for greener pastures and never return.

One major factor that comes out vividly from an interview with a lecturer at Makerere University is the issue of poor remuneration. Lecturers are highly educated but receive little money which does not fulfil their financial and material desires in a society which cherishes financial and material success. This finding is in tandem with El Khawas (2004) who analysed brain drain in Africa, Guma (2011) who wrote on organisational factors which impacts employee retention and Ng'ethe, Iravo and Namusonge (2012) who made a related study in Kenya and decried the case of lecturers in Kenyan universities who are paid peanuts amidst inflation, big work load and high cost of living. The views are a reflection of the fact that lecturers perceived other organizations as paying better than the Universities and this was the reason they were leaving.

Table 2: Position, Gender and Turnover

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	17.950	1.585		11.326	.000
The likeliness of quitting by gender	-.326	.763	-.038	-.428	.669
Likeliness of quitting by position	-.872	.376	-.206	-2.319	.022

Dependent Variable: level

As can be observed from Table 2, there was a strong relationship between level of turnover and the position of the academic staff member. This is indicated by a probability of 0.022 which is lower than 0.05. However there was no significant relationship between levels of turnover and gender of the lecturers. This is shown by a probability of 0.669 which is greater than 0.05. The results indicated that labour turnover at universities is not associated with being a male or female

The study further examined the estimates of staff turnover by the Lecturers themselves and the results were as indicated in Table 3.

Table 3: Attrition over the Last One Year

Number of staff who left	Frequency	Percentage
1-10	45	31
11-15	56	38
16-20	21	14
20 & above	25	17
Total	147	100

As can be observed in Table 3, the respondents perceived that the staff who left in the previous year were ranging from 1 to over 20. Those who thought the range was between 11-15 were the majority and followed by those who thought it was between 1-10. The study found out however that though there are many lecturers who have left; it is not easy to tell whether they have left or not. For example, someone has asked for leave without pay and goes to another country. One cannot tell whether he or she will come back or if he or she comes back to the country whether he or she will still be willing to work at the University.

The researchers tried to understand where the staff go to when they leave the University. The results in Table 4 indicate that university lecturers join other organisations such as parastatals, private sector organisations, consultancies and/or go abroad for greener pastures. Even during the interviews a related view was revealed:

Table 4: Destinations of Employees when they Leave University Service

	Frequency	Percentage
Parastatals	34	23
Private sector organisations	47	32
Consultancy	30	20
Other countries	37	25
Total	148	100

The government authorities, parastatals and projects pay super salaries. Government claims that such organisations drive the economy and their employees must be paid higher salaries. Most lecturers strive to join government organisations that are paying very well. These include, Uganda Revenue Authority (URA), Uganda National Forestry Authority (UFA), Uganda National Roads Authority (UNRA), the Bureau of Statistics (BoS), the Kampala Capital City Authority (KCCA), the National Social Security Fund (NSSF), Bank of Uganda (BOU) and so on. Others however go to other countries where payment is good especially Rwanda, Botswana, Britain and the USA.

The researchers also examined the reasons for leaving. The findings were that the majority of the staff had left due to the working environment, training opportunities, payment, conflicts and promotion policy.

The second objective of the study aimed at unveiling the motivational strategies practiced in the Universities and their relationship with faculty turnover. The relationship was tested with the Pearson Product moment correlation as follows;

Table 5: The relationship between staff turnover and motivational factors

		Level of labour turnover	Adequacy	Motivations
Level of Labour Turnover	Pearson Correlation	1	.288**	.313**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000
	N	144	144	144
Adequacy	Pearson Correlation	.288**	1	.738**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000
	N	144	150	147
Motivations	Pearson Correlation	.313**	.738**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	
	N	144	147	147

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The results indicated that there was a relationship between labour turnover and motivational factors. This is indicated by a Pearson Product Moment correlation of 0.7313 at a calculated probability of 0.000 on the relationship

between staff turnover and the employees' perceived adequacy of motivation strategies, the results indicated a Pearson coefficient of 0.288 at a calculated probability of 0.000. Since the probability is lower than 0.05, it then means that the relationship exists. The descriptive statistics were also analysed to determine the nature of the relationship as indicated in the preceding presentations. The researchers' further investigated the motivational strategies especially staff training opportunities and the results are indicated in

Table 6: Staffing, Training Opportunities and Turnover

	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	44	30
Agree	56	38
Neutral	24	16
Disagree	13	9
Strongly Disagree	11	7
Total	148	100

As can be observed in Table 6, the employees agreed that there were training opportunities at the universities, that is 29% strongly agreed, 37 % agreed while 16% remained neutral as compared to 8% who disagreed while 7% strongly disagreed. Even during the face to face interaction, there was expression of satisfaction to the training opportunities but the complaint was that at times there was segregation. It was expressed that most of the better training opportunities like going abroad were given to relatives and friends of the University Managers.

The researchers also investigated the aspect of promotion policy management and the majority still revealed that there were promotion opportunities. This view was revealed by 14 (9%) who strongly agreed, 49 (32%) agreed while 36 (24%) remained neutral as compared to 32 (21%) who disagreed while 17 (11%) strongly disagreed. There were complaints however in regards to promotions management.

The challenge with promotions is that they associated with research and publications which is very unfair because the university does not provide funds for faculty research and even when some money comes in, there is technical segregation and those who are favoured get the money. This means those who are favoured will be promoted and others will remain in the same position until they get a break through. It is unfair to use research and publication as standard for promotion and ignoring other activities such as community outreach, supervision of students' research projects and the number of years somebody has taught in the university.

The researchers examined whether the staff members had other earning opportunities than only teaching. The results indicated that 6 (4%) strongly agreed, 14 (9%) agreed while 46 (30%) remained neutral as compared to 56 (37%) who disagreed while 28 (18%) strongly disagreed.

On whether the staff members had opportunities to visit other countries and attend conferences, the findings were 4 (3%) who strongly agreed, 31 (20%) agreed while 38 (25%) were neutral. This distribution left 56 (37%) who disagreed 20 (13%) who strongly disagreed. Even during interviews with the lecturers, this aspect was reflected on.

The university does not create an opportunity for staff members to go out and attend conferences. It is a staff member who creates the opportunity and pays for himself and herself before going to present a paper or just to participate in a workshop or attend an international academic conference. Those who are lucky are sponsored by international aid agencies of philanthropists. It was also important to study whether employees have an opportunity to part-time in other organizations. The results are indicated in Table 7.

Table 7: Part-timing in other Organisations

	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly agree	22	14.7
Agree	35	23.3
Neutral	41	27.3
Disagree	37	24.7
Strongly Disagree	15	10.0
Total	150	100.0

The majority of the respondents accepted that part timing was allowed officially for some faculty members. During interview, a lecturer said that what was important for the majority was a staff member to teach as required and use the other time that was available for him or her in other activities.

The teaching staff were asked to rate the extent to which they would agree that they are given research funds. The results are indicated in Table 8.

Table 8: Distribution of Participants by Level of Agreement that they receive Research Funding

	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	27	18.0
Agree	28	18.7
Neutral	40	26.7
Disagree	35	23.3
Strongly Disagree	20	13.3
Total	150	100.0

Even during the face to face interaction, staff members expressed their feelings that universities ignore research funding in their annual budgets. It is also that true research funds were available from aid organisations but the competition was also stiff. Some staff members individually were applying to different organizations and if they succeeded well and good. It was hence the survival of the fittest.

Uganda's developmental challenges demand that universities should stand up as one leading place to prepare the nation for the expected leap forward. However evidence from the study suggests that the institutions remain ill prepared due partly to the low morale of the lecturer, which in turn has increased the rate of labour turnover from the system. It is fair to say that lecturers will put in their best when the work environment is conducive; when there are good welfare packages like good houses, adequate health and medical insurance, training and development opportunities and other relevant fringe benefits. In the absence of these, it can only be expected that frustration and eventually quits will result.

Given their role in society, there is a strong case to pay special attention to university academics while not constituting them into a special class. However, it is important to further explore opportunities to provide more incentives to enable lecturers maximize their role in the development process. In doing this, we have also shown that economic incentives on their own do not provide sufficient motivation for university teachers. A holistic approach, which adequate takes into account crucial non-economic factors as well must be employed. Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations can be surmised.

A number of recommendations aimed at improving the situation in public universities were made and these include the following:

Public universities should motivate lecturers towards better performance. Salaries and fringe benefits such as housing, free medical services and subsidised transport should be enhanced and made relevant to prevailing inflation economic circumstances in Uganda by reviewing them periodically. A fair and equitable pay-system will help prevent high turnover. Inadequate rewards leads to de-motivation and voluntary turnover. Universities should device means of giving recognition to deserving lecturers.

Academic staff development should be accorded priority since possible growth and advancement on the job is a vital motivational factor. Well-designed training programs should be emphasized not just to meet the professional needs of university Lecturers but also to enhance the quality of teaching and ensure the retention of competent and dedicated staff. The evidence is clear that well trained and competent Lecturers provided with relevant conditions tend to be less inclining to leave. Lecturers should be

sponsored to attend short courses and professional courses including relevant post graduate diploma courses that can enhance skills and motivation.

Public universities in Uganda should only admit students enough for available facilities to avoid overcrowding and to address workload challenges. Prominence should be given to the provision of research and conference grants. Attendants and participation in seminars and conferences should be encouraged to enrich the knowledge and skills of Lecturers.

The job should be enriched and made more challenging by allowing lecturers to have a good chance to take control over the way they do their job recognize important contributions and promotion prospects should be improved in order to enhance lecturers' sense of achievement and advancement will increase. There is need to reconsider the retirement age of lecturers and professors. In the Ugandan situation, it is wrong to retire a lecturer at 60 years when public universities are understaffed. In the present circumstances it should be their ability to deliver and not their age.

Funding by government is very critical but is never enough. Public universities in Uganda suffer from political interference and universities cannot fix their own realistic fees according to market forces. Universities must also generate funds by utilising their estates. The money generated can boost salaries and improve working conditions of lecturers to mitigate faculty turnover.

Like in developed economies, Public Universities in Uganda should link with the local Industries can offer endowments of professional chairs in certain disciplines; can offer donations of cash, laboratory equipment, furniture, computers, chemicals and reagents among others. Meanwhile universities can offer industry feasibility studies, surveys, proposals and consultancies. All this would make the work of faculty easier.

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