

# EFFECT OF ACADEMIC STAFF RETENTION ON QUALITY EDUCATION IN PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES IN KENYA

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## Abstract

*In recent years, there has been an increase of students' enrollment in private universities in Kenya. In effect, there has been a great need to recruit and retain quality academic staff. Studies reveal that it has been difficult to retain academic staff especially in private universities in specialized areas and required experience. A literature gap exists in Kenya on the effect of academic staff retention on the quality of education in private universities. The aim of the study was to determine the effect of academic staff retention on quality education in private universities in Kenya. A survey design was considered appropriate for this study. A sample of 336 respondents was used to collect data which included the Human resource managers, academic staff, and students of the selected universities. The sample was selected using purposive stratified and simple random sampling techniques. Questionnaires were used to collect the data which was analyzed by use of frequencies and percentages. The study established that academic staff retention affects quality of education in private universities in Kenya. It was concluded that academic staff retention has a significant effect on quality education without which quality would be compromised. The study recommended that private universities should formulate and implement retention policies and allocate adequate resources to curb high academic staff turnover.*

**Key words:** *academic staff retention, private universities, quality of academic staff, quality education, university education.*

## Introduction

The establishment of private higher institutions has been embraced both in developed and developing countries as a means of expanding access, equity and equality to higher education. Varghese (2004) points out that in many African countries, public universities for many years have nearly monopolized the provision of higher education. But due to market friendly reforms, deregulation policies and the financial crisis that many African states are experiencing, an enabling environment for the development of private higher education has been created. According to Teferra and Altbach (2004), private higher education is a growing trend in most African countries and although religious groups founded such institutions for specialized train-

ing, a good number of them have diversified their academic programmes so that at the moment they offer a wide range of academic and professional disciplines.

In Kenya, private universities emerged in the 1980's and 1990's as a result of a policy shift that saw the recognition of private universities. For example the 1996 policy framework, led the government to see the need of implementing policy that was to encourage private sector participation in the establishment and operation of higher education institutions (Republic of Kenya, 1996), a move that saw the reinstatement of several policy documents which included the revision of the master plan on education and training (Republic of Kenya, 1997) and the report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Education System in Kenya (Republic of Kenya, 2000). The commitment of the government to expand higher education was through the report of the Presidential Working Party on the Second University popularly known as the Mackay Report of 1981. This report recommended the removal of the Advanced "A" level of secondary education and the expansion of other post-secondary training institutions in Kenya. Another factor that catalyzed the rapid growth of institutions of higher learning was the economic downturn of the 1980's, a condition that forced the Kenyan government to reduce spending in public universities. This created a gap that led to private university involvement in the provision of higher education (Republic of Kenya, 1996). However, as a result of private universities in Kenya enrolling large number of students and meeting the requirements for accreditation with the Commission for University Education of Kenya, several issues and challenges concerning the quality of education have arisen (Lam, 2009). The challenge of maintaining quality of education may be realized through retaining highly qualified academic staff. However, the struggle to retain well trained academic staff poses the most formidable challenge to these institutions and yet it is the most critical in ensuring quality of education.

#### *Problem of the Research*

Despite the critical role private universities play in Kenya, issue of staff retention of academic staff by these institutions and how it affects quality of education has been less documented as it is in other developing and developed countries. Good quality university education is an important avenue towards nurturing professionals needed by both the private and public sector in various economies for better private business and better governance. Thus with well qualified and committed academic staff, institution of higher learning can ensure sustainability and quality of university education. Consequently, there is need to investigate the effects of staff retention on quality of education in private universities in Kenya.

#### *Research Focus*

The problem of academic staff retention is a worldwide issue that is experienced by most institutions of higher learning both in the developing and developed countries. Some researches that have been conducted focus on the role of academic and non-academic factors in improving university retention (Lotkowski, Robbins, & Noeth, 2004). Others examine the staff capacity erosion as a factor that threatens to reduce the impact on retention reforms. Obviously, these researches failed to link retention with quality education in institutions of higher learning more so in private universities. This study therefore, sought to fill this gap of linking academic staff retention with quality education in private universities in Kenya.

Each institution has its own challenges of retaining academic staff. For instance, in the United States of America, during the 1997-1998 academic year alone, about 7.7% of all full-time academic staff left their institutions for other places. Of these, only 29% were retirees and the remaining 71% left their institutions for variety of reasons (Tetty, 2003). Although the rea-

sons for faculty exit to other places are not given in this study, it confirms the fact that faculty retention is a real challenge that needs to be addressed.

The situation in Africa where the current study is situated is no different from what is happening elsewhere. In the context of academic staff retention, Ng'ethe, Assie-Lumumba, George and Esi (2003) observe that staff retention remains a major challenge in most African universities. Also Bolag (2004) notes that many higher education establishments in Africa have been struggling with retaining their academic staff for a variety of reasons. This is mainly attributable to low salary and low benefit structures as well as other causes of dissatisfaction. In particular, insufficient pay and unfavourable working conditions have been the major reasons why many academic staff members of African universities decide to leave their institutions in search of better pay and working conditions elsewhere. Furthermore, African universities have been experiencing brain drain which is described as a process through which a significant number of academic staff is lost to other sectors of the economy within the country or to other countries (Ishengoma, 2007). A study conducted in five universities of sub-Saharan Africa indicated that universities are losing sizable amounts of their human capital which significantly limits their capability to provide quality training to their students, with some fields affected more than others (Tettey, 2006). Therefore, from the preceding information, it can be argued that higher education globally is faced with the problem of retaining their academic staff for various reasons thus the need to determine the effect of this phenomenon on quality of education.

## **Methodology of Research**

### *General Background of Research*

The design adopted for this study was a survey. An advantage of using survey design is that it draws a sample of the population and then generalizes the finding from the sample to the population (Graziano & Raulin, 2007). It also helps to assess people's thoughts, opinions, and feelings and provides a flat form to summarize and generalize the views of all respondents succinctly (Shaughnessy, Zechmeister, & Zechmeister, 2000). The study was conducted in four private universities in Kenya that have been chartered by the Commission for University Education. Kenya. The study was delimited to the retention of academic staff and quality education. This was because retention of academic staff was assumed to affect quality education. The study respondents were the Human Resource Managers or their equivalent, the academic staff, third and fourth year students of selected private universities in Kenya. The academic staff chosen for the study were those who had been at their institutions for at least five years. The study was based on the expectancy theory which states that people enter work organizations with expectations and values, and if these expectations and values are met, they are likely to remain a member of the organization for a longer period. This theory presupposes that if the perceived expectations are not met then people will most likely leave the organization.

### *Sample of the Research*

The study targeted four (4) chartered private universities. The four institutions were purposively chosen because they had been established for a long period of time as private universities in Kenya. A sample of 336 respondents that comprised the Human Resource Managers (16), the teaching staff (200) and students (120) participated in the study. Purposive sampling method was used to select the human resource managers and stratified random sampling techniques were used to select the academic staff and the students from each university. In effect, two strata were formed: the academic staff (Full time and Part-time) and the students (Third and Fourth years). The reason for using stratified sampling was to obtain specific information on

perception from each segment of the population. From the two strata of teaching staff and that of students, simple random sampling technique was applied to obtain the actual respondents from each stratum.

### *Instruments and Procedures*

The study utilized a questionnaire and an interview schedule to collect data from the four selected private universities. The questionnaire had both the open-ended and closed-ended items. The close-ended items in the questionnaire were formulated based on the Likert-scale. The open-ended items on the other hand provide greater depth of response that fairly reveals the mind of the respondent (Chepchieng, 2001). The questionnaire was used to obtain data from the teaching staff as well as from the students. On other hand, the interview schedule was used obtain data from the University Management. The interview schedule was used to obtain in-depth data which was not possible to obtain using questionnaires. The instruments were validated by three Quality Assurance Officers from three universities. Through the validation, the experts were asked to check on the clarity of instructions to respondents, wordings of items and appropriateness and adequacy of the items in addressing the variables of study. The researchers used the recommendations made by the experts to modify the instruments. Moreover, a pilot study involving 84 respondents was conducted in two private universities that were not used in the actual study to get the opinions of the Human Resource Managers, Academic staff and students on the items and also to establish the reliability of the instruments. Reliability of the instruments was computed using Cronbach's alpha method where a reliability coefficient of 0.83 was obtained which was above the expected threshold of 0.7 in education and social sciences. Consequently, the instrument was considered reliable.

### *Data Analysis*

To establish the extent to which academic staff retention affect quality education, descriptive statistics were applied. In effect, frequency and percentage tables were generated.

## **Results of Research**

### *Effects of Academic Staff Retention on Quality Education*

This study examined how retention of academic staff affects quality education in private universities in Kenya. This was determined by asking the University human Resource managers, academic staff and students their views on how academic staff retention or lack of it affects quality education. The findings of the study revealed a clear strong view that academic staff retention affects quality education. For instance 87.5 % of student respondents were in agreement that academic staff retention affects quality education. On the other hand 84.0 % of the academic staff shared the same view that retention affects quality education. Interestingly, 87.5% of the Human resource managers as it was with the case of the students supported the view that retention of academic staff affects quality education. The students' respondents identified three main areas which relate to quality education and which retention of academic staff directly or indirectly affects. The information in Table 1 gives a summary of the findings.

**Table 1. Human resource managers, academic staff and students' views on retention's effects on quality education.**

Statement	Yes	No	Total
Academic staff retention affects quality education in a private university ( <b>Students' response</b> )	87.5	12.5	100.0
Academic staff retention affects quality education in a private university ( <b>Academic staff response</b> )	84.0	16.0	100.0
Academic staff retention affects quality education in a private university ( <b>Human Resource Managers' response</b> )	87.5	12.5	100.0

According to the human resource management respondents, retention of academic staff affects quality education in many ways that include: Promoting motivation which affects quality (31.3%), policies on staff development that help built quality in staff which translate to quality delivery (37.5%) and that of facilitating research (31.3%). Table 2 gives a summary of the findings.

**Table 2. Human resource managers' responses on areas academic staff retention affect quality education.**

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Promoting motivation which affects quality education	5	31.3
Policies on staff development which help built quality in staff which translate to quality delivery	6	37.5
Facilitates research	5	31.3
Total	16	100

A greater number of student respondents 86.6% who indicated strongly agree and agree (in Table 3) observed that by instituting effective retention policy among academic staff members, staff would get enough time to pursue other things related to teaching and research. This is because when the staff is assured of their job security, among other issues, the academic staff would dedicate their time to teaching and conducting research. Consequently, involvement in extensive research by the retained academic staff as observed by the students, determines quality education. Moreover, student respondents observed that academic staff retention leads to smooth flow of teaching which determines quality education.

The academic staff respondents (81.5%) pointed out that staff retention provides a common ground for smooth flow of teaching which determines quality. The findings further reveal that by instituting effective retention policy, academic staffs are motivated in their task. Student respondents (65.8%) argued that it motivates lecturers to stay and develop while those undecided on this issue were 31.7% with only 2.5% who disagreed. On the same vein, 84.5% staff respondents argued that retention policy is likely to lead to motivating academic staff thus en-

hancing quality education. Moreover, 70.0% of student respondents pointed out that retention policy enables lecturers to have time to mentor students. This can be through work like close guidance in the field of their specializations but more so in research. This response indicates that mentoring as part of career development still plays a great role in most universities. It is upon private universities to provide career development and mentoring alongside guidance and counseling services in their institutions. It could also be integrated in curriculum.

In addition, it can be seen from the same findings that the teaching staff (83.5%) observed that retention policy ensures tenure among staff which boosts commitment and productivity while only 7.5% were undecided, and 2.0% disagreed and those who did not agree that retention policy (not applicable) affects quality education constituted 7.0%.

Besides the positive effects of academic retention on quality education, the student respondents observed that retention policy may negatively affect quality education. According to 34.0% of them the length of stay of lecturers in an institution may lead them to favor students in their academic pursuits. This response could be attributed to the notion that the longer the lecturers stay in a particular institution, the higher the possibility they would get used to their students and thus not be objective in their evaluations. The findings are summarized in Table 3.

**Table 3. Academic staff and students' views on areas of quality education affected by staff retention.**

Areas	SA	A	UD	D	SD	NA
Staff does not have time to pursue other things related to teaching and research due to workload ( <b>students' response</b> )	23.2	63.4	8.4	0.5	0.0	0.0
Lead to smooth flow of teaching which determines quality ( <b>academic staff response</b> )	31.0	50.5	9.5	1.0	1.0	7.0
Motivates lecturers to stay and develop themselves ( <b>students' response</b> )	23.3	2.5	31.7	2.5	0.0	0.0
May lead to motivation hence good quality ( <b>academic staff response</b> )	36.0	44.0	7.0	1.0	0.5	7.0
Lecturers can have time to mentor students ( <b>students' responses</b> )	14.2	55.8	30.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Ensures tenure which boosts commitment and productivity ( <b>Academic staff responses</b> )	39.5	44.0	7.5	1.5	0.5	7.0
May lead to favoring of students ( <b>Students' responses</b> )	13.0	21.0	28.5	23.5	7.0	7.0

## Discussion

The problem of academic staff retention is a worldwide issue that has been and is still being experienced by most institutions of higher learning both in the developing and developed countries. For instance, in the United States of America, during the 1997-1998 academic year alone, about 7.7% of all full-time academic staff left their institutions for other places. Of these, only 29% were retirees and the remaining 71% left their institutions for variety of reasons (Tetty, 2003). Elsewhere, the Australian Higher institutions of learning in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century were faced with a crisis of academic staff labor shortage of about 20,000 (Mathew, 2003). This was a large figure for academic institutions that intended to maintain credible academic standards.

The situation in Africa is no different from what is happening elsewhere. In the context of academic staff retention, Ng'ethe, Assie-Lumumba, George and Esi (2003) observed that staff retention remains a major challenge in most African universities. Bolag (2003) also notes that many higher education establishments in Africa have been struggling with retaining their academic staff for a variety of reasons. This is mainly attributable to low salary and low benefit structures as well as other causes of dissatisfaction. In particular, insufficient pay and unfavourable working conditions have been the major reasons why many academic staff members of African universities decide to leave their institutions in search of better pay and working conditions elsewhere. Furthermore, African universities have been experiencing brain drain which is described as a process through which a significant number of academic staff is lost to other sectors of the economy within the country or to other countries (Ishengoma, 2007). A study conducted in five universities of sub-Saharan Africa indicated that universities are losing sizable amounts of their human capital which significantly limits their capability to provide quality training to their students, with some fields affected more than others (Tettey, 2006). Therefore, from the preceding information, it can be argued that higher education globally is faced with the problem of retaining their academic staff for various reasons.

Current research findings corroborates Selesho (2014) who established that retention of employees in higher education institutions (HEIs) is a serious concern because a high employee turnover has grave implications for the quality, consistency, and stability of academic enterprises. Moreover, our research findings agree with Powell (2010) who found that turnover can have detrimental effects on students and remaining academic staff members, who struggle to give and receive quality services, when positions are vacated and then filled by inexperienced personnel. According to Horwitz (1991) high turnover rates can reinforce clients' mistrust of the System and can discourage workers from remaining in, or even entering, the field. In the higher education sector, when academic staff leaves, it can also impact on the student: staff ratio ((Strebler et al., 2006). Thus one of the key effects of retention problems is an increase in the workload burden on existing staff which eventually affects the quality of education offered in the institution of learning.

## Conclusions

This research has revealed that academic staff retention affects main areas of quality education which includes: smooth flow in teaching, facilitating lecturers and students with enough time for research, motivating academic staff to develop themselves, facilitating mentoring of students and leading to commitment and productivity. On the other hand, academic staff retention was also seen to have some negative effect in that overstaying may lead to favoring of students.

It is evident from the study therefore that the issue of academic staff retention in Kenyan private universities and elsewhere is a pertinent issue in as far as quality education is concerned. In effect private institutions of higher learning, need to be aware that if less attention is given to retention policies it can adversely compromise quality education a great deal.

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