Regressive Staff Retention Challenges in Zimbabwe's Public and Private Universities: Selected Retained Lecturers' Perceptions

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Abstract

This paper critically assessed regressive staff retention challenges in purposively selected Zimbabwe's public and private universities from the Retained Lecturers' perceptions. Three public and one private Universities' criterion-sampled Retained Lecturers took part in the study. The findings were generated from the open-ended interview. Open-ended interview data were analysed using data analysis software called NVivo. The study's key finding was that both sets of the universities were let down by inadequate funds. It also found that the regressive challenge regarding recruiting relatively young lecturers to teach Psychology was perceived as one other teething challenge in one of the public universities, a challenge that private universities did not experience. The study's main conclusion is that lack of funds was the greatest regressive staff retention challenge in both kinds of the studied universities as it undermined all staff retention efforts and attempts in the universities. The major recommendation of the study is the need for public and private universities to source adequate funding from diverse individual funders to world class international donor communities to boost university business operations meant to enhance staff retention.

Key words: Regressive Staff Retention Challenges, Staff Retention, Staff Retention Challenges, Retained Lecturers, Retained Lecturers' Perception

Background to the Study

This paper is a fourth excerpt from the researcher's thesis (in press) entitled, 'A Comparative Case Study of Zimbabwe's Public and Private Universities' Staff Retention Strategies' submitted for examination to the Zimbabwe Open University late in 2014. Organisations world over appear to some teething challenges in the area of talent management (Charles, 2010, Scott, 2012). Failure to manage staff turnover, staff loss and brain drain is no longer confined to the Third World's countries' organisations. From a developed country's perspective, Sohail, Muneer, Tanveer and Tariq (2011), Boyne, John and Petrovsky (2011) and Scott (2012) in the United States (The US) pointed out that estimates suggest that the cost of employee turnover often ranges from 50% to 200% of the employee's annual salary based on the type and level of job he/she holds. Similarly, two Asian studies, Sohail et al. (2011) in Pakistan and Rahman (2010) in Bangladesh concur that employee turnover is a major organisational menace. Also, in the United Kingdom (The UK), Jongbloed (2012) found out that in recent years there has been substantial improvement in academic salaries and benefits. However, due to recent cuts in public funding, the continued affordability of the UK salaries and benefits has been called into question. In Africa, in Zambia, Mutume (2003) explored ways of reversing Africa's brain drain and observed the following staff retention challenges as a result of brain drain. The author found out that many African professionals are dissuaded from returning home by the economic and political crises that have bedevilled the continent over the last few decades. Also, Mutume (2003) established that failing economies, high unemployment rates, human rights abuses, armed conflict and lack of adequate social services are some of these factors. In South Africa, many organisations highlight the dire skills shortage that has resulted from employees with critical skills leaving organisations to find better opportunities

beyond the borders of given countries (Van Dyk, Coetzee and Tebele, 2013).Two studies from Zimbabwe underscore the above studies' observations. First, the effectiveness of staff retention strategies in retaining lecturers in the Zimbabwean universities is being undermined by the unfavourable socio-political economic environment in the second half of the 21st Century's first decade (Samuel and Chipunza, 2009). Second, Mupemhi and Mupemhi (2011, p. 40) concluded that although they believed that the university culture, business strategy, HR strategy and reward strategy are key factors in attracting motivating and retaining staff, the business strategy and HR strategy are not the driving forces of employee attraction, motivation and retention. Mupemhi and Mupemhi (2011) observed that the MSU's business strategy was an ineffective staff retention strategy because it emerged that both academic and non-academic staff representatives were not aware of it. These highlighted findings from different countries' organisational experiences seem to point to a common fact that staff retention challenges are here to stay with organisations regardless the level of development of their country of origin. Some of the papers were empirical reviews (for example, Mutume, 2003). The studies seem to concur that staff retention challenges experienced in the studied organisations are prone to socio-political and economic problems. The studies were not based on university Retained Lecturers' perceptions. It is on account of such gaps that the current study assesses regressive staff retention challenges in selected Zimbabwe's public and private universities from the Retained Lecturers' perceptions. The study duly compares Zimbabwe's public and private universities from the Retained Lecturers' perceptions regarding regressive staff retention challenges.

Statement of the problem

Management of staff retention challenges has been seen to be a cause for concern in many organisations around the globe (Daly and Dee, 2006 in Ng'ethe, Iravo and Namusonge, 2012; Gordon, 2009). Being mindful of this concern, organisations strive to employ talent management strategies, only to be let down by incessant staff retention challenges. It is against the background of such experiences that this study assesses regressive staff retention challenges in selected Zimbabwe's public and private universities from the Retained Lecturers' perceptions.

Purpose of the study

The study's sole aim is to generate new knowledge regarding a regressive staff retention challenges in selected Zimbabwe's public and private universities from the Retained Lecturers' perception.

Objectives of the study

The study's dual objective is to:

- Assess regressive staff retention challenges in selected Zimbabwe's public and private universities from the Retained Lecturers' perceptions.

Research objectives

The study's main research question is 'how do Retained Lecturers in Zimbabwe's selected public and private universities perceive regressive staff retention challenges?' From this main research questions, two sub-questions emerge:

- What are the perceived regressive staff retention challenges in selected Zimbabwe's public and private universities from the Retained Lecturers' perceptions?
- Why are the perceived staff retention challenges in selected Zimbabwe's public and private universities regressive from the Retained Lecturers' perceptions?

Justification of the study

The carrying out of this study is justified for two reasons. First, the study is bound to produce information which might assist university and other non-university organisations' managers to minimise the occurrence of regressive staff retention challenges. Second, the study incrementally and situationally influences policy decisions regarding mitigation of regressive staff retention challenges in diverse organisations.

Literature Review

Under this section, a cross section of related studies drawn from selected countries of the world is reviewed. In Europe, Jongbloed (2012) identified three challenges. First, he observed that when compared to France, universities in the UK have much more autonomy over whom to appoint and what to pay and the academics in the UK do not have civil-service status, unlike in most European countries. Second, Jongbloed (2012) found out that in recent years there has been substantial improvement in academic salaries and benefits. However, due to recent cuts in public funding, the continued affordability of the UK salaries and benefits has been called into question. Also, he indicated that while the proportion of staff with part time contracts has increased over the past three years, the ability to secure high-level academics in the future will pose a major challenge to the UK, higher education system.

In Asia, Hong, Hao, Kumar, Ramendran and Kadiresan (2012, p. 74) observed that, "empowerment is not adopted effectively in Asian countries due to high power distance." Hong et al. (2012, p. 74) further found out that, "managers may not take employee empowerment seriously because managers are treated as the people who can make the best decisions in Asian organisations." These findings contradict with Pitts, Marvel and Fernandez's (2001), findings in the U.S. on empowerment citing Thomas and Velthouse (1990) arguing that from a psychological perspective, empowerment is a process leading to an internal cognitive state characterised by increased task motivation and enhanced feelings of self-efficacy (Conger and Kanungo, 1988 in Pitts et al., 2011).

In the US, Scott (2012) even cite Allen (2006), Ghansah (2011) and O'Connel and Kung (2007) who contend that these costs are substantial for even medium sized organisations that have moderate rates of turnover. Scott (2012) also concur with Gordon (2009) who predicts that talent shortages are going to increase well into the next decade, limiting the ability of companies to expand, and in fact, jeopardising their chances of survival as global competition becomes more intense. These findings have been disputed by Hassan (2013) using previous research findings by Kim and Wright (2007); Wright and Kim (2004) who observed that studies in public management in the US found a negative connection between role ambiguity and job satisfaction. But they were disconfirmed by Jung (2012) and Kim and Wright (2007) who found a positive relationship between role ambiguity and turnover intention at the individual analysis.

Botha, Busin and De Swardt (2011, p. 2) identify staff retention challenges in South Africa by citing the works of:

- Boshard and Louw (2010), Charest (2011), Ingam (2006) and Prinsloo (2008) who point out that the impact of talent shortage obstructs organisational efforts to execute against growth strategies thereby rendering sustainability threats to organisations and straining economic growth.
- Armstrong (2007), Crous (2007), Leonard (2007b) and Michington (2006) who concur that a research of current literature has revealed that the global talent pool is shrinking and organisations are uncertain as to what talent management decisions they should be making.
- Boshard and Louw (2010), Charest (2011) and Prinsloo (2008) who feel that talent shortages can render organisations vulnerable in terms of competitive sustainability.

Mhlanga, Matope, Mugwagwa, Phuthi and Moyo (2013, p. 118) highlighted one staff retention challenge related to academic staff development strategies in engineering fields of study in Zimbabwe:

- The challenge has been the decision on the mode of study: whether to go via taught masters or masters by research; where to allow faculty members to study in the region or beyond, on a full time or on a part time basis or on a split-site basis.

This challenge has been due to the need to have a quick but quality programme of staff development, while maximising on the resources available for staff development.

The reviewed related literature on challenges faced by different countries' organisations reveal that challenges experienced in those countries are situation specific. Key challenges revolved around lack of resources for staff development, talent shortages, a negative connection between role ambiguity and job satisfaction, and a positive relationship between role ambiguity and turnover intention at the individual analysis. Managers may not take employee empowerment seriously and recent cuts in public funding also topped among staff retention challenges. These findings originated from the different settings with the current study's focus. They were not obtained from Retained Lecturers. It is against the backdrop of such gaps, that the present study assesses regressive staff

retention challenges in selected Zimbabwe's public and private universities from the Retained Lecturers' perceptions.

Methodology

This qualitative study suited the study for two reasons. First, qualitative research means studying phenomena in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or integrate, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998 in Mhlanga, 2008). Second, qualitative research shapes the way researchers approach problems, the methods they use to generate and analyse data, as well as the type of problems they choose to investigate (Maykut and Morehouse, 1994 in Mhlanga, 2008). Thus, qualitative research enabled the researcher to generate detailed data on regressive staff retention challenges in selected Zimbabwe's public and private universities from the Retained Lecturers' perceptions.

The current study was anchored on the case study approach because of the contextual nature of the problem the researcher was exploring. As Yin (1994, p. 31) in Mhlanga (2008, p. 69) puts it, "...the major rationale for using this [case study design] is when your investigation must cover both a particular phenomenon and the context within the phenomenon is occurring." To permit cross comparison of contexts and to capture a wide spectrum of regressive staff retention challenges in selected Zimbabwe's public and private universities from the Retained Lecturers' perceptions, the researcher used a particular case study strategy known as a multi-case study approach in literature (Kumar, 2008). This enabled this researcher to explore types of staff retention challenges in selected Zimbabwe's public and private universities from the Retained Lecturers' perceptions and try to established why such staff retention challenges are perceived as regressive.

Two public universities (Cases 1 and 4) and two private universities (Cases 2 and 3) were selected using purposeful sampling. As Kumar (2008) and Patton (1990) concur, purposeful sampling ensure that researcher carefully select information-rich cases. The current researcher intentionally sampled the aforementioned cases that provided rich information on staff retention challenges in selected Zimbabwe's public and private universities from the Retained Lecturers' perceptions. This enhanced deep understanding of the studied phenomenon.

Three public universities' Retained Lecturers (Case 1 Retained Lecturers 1 and 2, and Case 4 Retained Lecturer 1) and one private university Retained Lecturer (Case 2 Retained Lecturer 1) were selected using criterion sampling. Kombo and Tromp (2009) refer to criterion sampling as a purposeful sampling strategy where thick descriptions of each case can be obtained from participants who have lived experiences about the problem under study. Thus, the researcher was able to gather thick descriptions regarding regressive staff retention challenges in selected Zimbabwe's public and private universities from the Retained Lecturers' perceptions.

The researcher generated data from the open-ended interview. The four participants were interviewed three times each between September 2013 and December 2013. This was done in line with the expectations of carrying out qualitative research- sustained long interviews, prolonged stay in the research sites and member checking (Gray, 2009; Silverman, 2014). Open-ended interviews enabled the researcher to probe issues raised by the participants regarding regressive staff retention challenges in selected Zimbabwe's public and private universities from the Retained Lecturers' perceptions. The interviews enable the researcher to "read between the lines" and get the meaning of what the participants implied from how they responded to certain questions, something the researcher could never have achieved through any other research method (Mhlanga, 2008).

The study's data were analysed using computer data analysis software called NVivo. It guided the researcher to come up with user-friendly themes which could be summarised it tabular form to enhance data presentation and

interpretation (Marshall and Rossman, 2011). In that regard, the researcher presented the research findings in Table 1 under the section of findings and discussion following the guidance provided by Chisaka and Kurasha (2012).

Findings and Discussion

This section presents and discusses the perceived regressive staff retention challenges from the perspective of Retained Lecturers.

Table 1: Retained Lecturers' perceptions regarding the challenge of inadequate resources

Themes	Sub-theme(s)	Substantiating statements
1.Inadequate resources	1. Recruitment of very young people to teach psychology	1…we are getting very young people and the very young people have got needs (Case 1 Retained Lecturer 1).
	2.Inadequate funds to support doctoral studies	1...the university failed to support these people…did not have enough funds… (Case 1 Retained Lecturer 1).
	3.Absence of money in the university	1…and the money is not there and that is the greatest challenge (Case 2 Retained Lecturer 1).
	4.Inability to visit regional centres	1…failure visit regional centres due to lack of funds (Case 1 Retained Lecturer 2).
2.Lack of career growth	1.Lack of support for staff development and professional exposure through contact and sabbatical leave	1. Contact leave is only given if you are in senior position (Case 1 Retained Lecturer 1). 2. Sabbatical leave is…everyone …tenured lecturer and that has not happened to a lot of lecturers (Case 1 Retained Lecturer 1).

Adopted and adapted from Chisaka and Kurasha (2012, p. 7)

The data presentation in Table 1 shows two themes which show the way Retained Lecturers argued that inadequate resources and lack of career growth were major challenges facing universities. Sub-themes for lack of career growth were; recruitment of very young people to teach Psychology, inadequate funds to support doctoral studies and absence of money in the university. The sub-theme for lack of career growth was lack of support for staff development and professional exposure through contact and sabbatical leave.

The challenge of recruiting relatively young people to teach Psychology

Due to high staff turnover that characterised the universities at the turn of the new millennium, some public universities ended up recruiting relatively young personnel. In describing this phenomenon, one of the public universities' participants, Case 1 Retained Lecturer 1 indicated that:

> *Right, Psychology is difficult to get people, so we are getting very young people and the relatively young people have too many needs and…. An encouragement for them to move further and that was not there so they would leave. We lost quite a few people.*

One observation emerges from the above excerpt. Relatively young lecturers are more geographically mobile than the senior and mature ones. The findings agree with Okpara (2004, p. 327-338) in Curran (2012, p. 21) who observed that there is a relationship between age and job satisfaction. Curran (2012) went on to argue that young people tend to be less satisfied by their current jobs than their relatively old colleagues. Recruitment of relatively young people signifies that universities will be manned by inexperienced lecturers at the expense of quality, even through the expectation is that they will grow with time if they do not quit before their full potential is realised. There is however no doubt that the relatively young lecturers, if properly qualified, inducted, motivated, committed and kept satisfied by their universities can become assets of their universities as they gain valuable experience in their jobs. The moment the more they gain experience, the more they prolong their stay, thereby, getting retained.

Inadequate funds to support doctoral studies

In relation to financial inadequacies in the area of supporting doctoral studies in public universities, Case 1 Retained Lecturer 2 remarked:

> *...to pursue their doctoral studies has been a challenge because the university has not been able to support these people because they did not have enough finances.*

The above excerpt is indicative of the way how inadequate funds to support lecturers' doctoral studies could be a regressive staff retention challenge in one of the studied public universities. Lack of support for doctoral studies can push lecturers out of a university. The lecturers who do not get such valuable support to pursue PhD studies in a university of their choice feel elbowed out of their university system. They feel unwanted, unvalued and unrecognised. On the basis of such experiences, those lecturers who educate themselves using their own resources quit the university upon completing their PhD studies, leaving the university with staff retention challenges.

Inadequate funds to permit National Centre staff visits to regional centres

Lecturers from Open and Distance Learning (ODL) public universities are expected to visit the regional campuses on a regular basis in order to monitor the quality of education obtaining there. The current study established that such visits were no longer existent owing to lack of funds. To demonstrate this, Case 1 Retained Lecturer 2 reported that:

> *Also members were unable to go to the regions due to lack of funds.*

In the absence of funds in ODL settings which have a multi-campus system covering the nation and beyond, the quality of education is bound to be compromised when National Programme Leaders and Deans fail to visit the regional centres to monitor the quality of education obtaining in those centres. It is common practice that National Programme Leaders and Deans regularly visit regional centres to collaborate with Regional Programme Co-ordinators and their part-time tutors to conduct tutorials, supervise research and dissertation students, share effective study habits and examination tips with students, Regional Programme Leaders and their part-time tutors. Unfortunately, the inadequate funds to permit National Centre staff visits to regional centres becomes a regressive staff retention challenge that undermines the quality of education in the long run at the studied public university if funds are continuously unavailable.

Absence of money in the university

The study also revealed that related to the challenge of inadequate funds to permit visits to regional centres, lack of money was among other very serious challenges faced by the universities. In expanding on the subject of financial inadequacies in the private universities' experiences, Case 2 Retained Lecturer 1 sums it up all by reporting that:

> *...salaries at...are not competitive... so the challenge here is really the sources which can be seen across the whole spectrum of teaching equipment, cars for different Faculties, some Faculties still have a car or two. So it's difficult to work because the money is not there. You see the money is not there and the VC repeats this all the time we don't have money. So most of the time, in the university the money is not there and that is the greatest challenge for retaining staff...*

The above findings and documentary evidence across the studied cases reveal that lack of money compromises the quality of research output and teaching as well as conducting community service. Thus, staff needs are not met. These findings agree with Ng'ethe, Iravo and Namusonge's (2012) observation that … institutions can only achieve the Vision 2030 by having adequate capacity in terms of human and other resources. Ng'ethe et al. (2012) further observe that shortage of finance and transport, among other resources, can be a handicap to staff retention in institutions. It can be deduced that absence of money in the university could be a regressive staff retention challenge since it impacts on the availability of all other kinds of resources and services meant to retain lecturers in the universities.

The challenges of lack of career growth among university lecturers

Lack of support for staff development and professional exposure through contact leave and sabbatical leave was perceived as one of the biggest staff retention challenges across the universities. With regards to the provision of contact leave, here is what a public university participant, Case 1 Retained Lecturer 1, said:

> *Contact leave is only given if you are in a senior position, if you are an ordinary lecturer you are not getting that. That is the point where we will lose people. We don't encourage that.*

From the above participant's view, it can be seen that ordinary lecturers are marginalised in terms of provision of contact leave. If they are aware that they are denied contact leave is among their job contractual obligations, they get frustrated and start to search for alternative jobs.

Related to the challenge of contact leave's impact on career growth among public university lecturers, Case 1 Retained Lecturer 1 participant had this to say about sabbatical leave:

> *Sabbatical leave is supposed to be given to everyone who is a lecturer, a tenured lecturer and that has not happened to a lot of lecturers. Although the university is encouraging people to go local for sabbatical leave, they have only started this year, no, last year. Before… it was not encouraging, there was no money.*

In the context of private universities, the following excerpt reflects the challenge of lack of career growth among university lecturers:

First, Case 2 Retained Lecturer 1 participant said:

> *Lecturers can go for study leave which is unpaid, yet they have family responsibilities to take care of. Issues of contact and sabbatical leave remain a dream for some of us.*

From the above comments, it can be perceived that lack of money in the universities hinders opportunities for lecturers' career growth. Lack of money limits their chances to go for sabbatical leave. The situation could be worse for those in need of contact leave because some tenured and senior lecturers who have served at least five years have not yet gone for sabbatical leave, thereby, depriving lecturers of their opportunities for professional and career growth.

Summary of Findings
Key regressive staff retention challenges in selected Zimbabwe's public and private universities can be summarised in two similarities and two differences from the perspective of the Retained Lecturer.

Similarities
With regards to how regressive staff retention challenges are experienced in the studied universities, the two similarities have emerged in this study. First, both sets of the universities were let down by inadequate funds. Second, lack of career growth, staff development and research opportunities was another regressive staff retention challenge in the studied universities.

Differences
With respect to differences in the regressive staff retention challenges in both kinds of the universities, the first regressive challenge is that of recruiting relatively young lecturers to teach Psychology was one other teething challenge in one of the public university, a challenge that private universities did not experience. Second, inadequate funds to permit Deans, National Programme Leaders and Chairpersons to visit regional centres found to be a regressive staff retention challenge in another public university, which again, private universities did not experience such a challenge.

Conclusions
In line with this study's findings, the researcher's conclusions are as given below in terms of two similarities and two differences on the basis of the Retained Lecturers' perceptions.

Similarities

With regards to how regressive staff retention challenges are similar in the selected public and private universities, the first conclusion of the study is that lack of funds was the greatest regressive staff retention challenge in both kinds of the studied universities as it undermines all staff retention efforts and attempts in the universities. Availability of funds is a determinant of all other kinds of resources in any university/non-university organisation. Another conclusion of the study is that otherwise loyal, competent and committed lecturers found themselves quitting their jobs owing to lack of career growth, staff development and research opportunities in the studied universities.

Differences

Regarding the differences between regressive staff retention challenges in selected Zimbabwe's public and private universities, two conclusions are made. First, the practice of recruiting relatively young lecturers without putting the necessary staff retention measures in place was detrimental in some public universities because such lecturers had relatively higher quit-rates than relatively mature and settled lecturers. The former are more geographical mobile than the latter. Second, in-not-so distant future, the quality of education in one of the public universities risks to be compromised if funds are not made available to enable to permit the National Centre staff to regularly visit the country-wide multi-campus centres. Best quality of education manifests itself when all academic staff members share visions, missions, knowledge, skills, competencies, experiences, attitudes, values, and perceptions and direction. Therefore, regular and constant interaction among lecturers is among the greatest pursuits for quality university education.

Recommendations

Consistent with the study's findings and conclusions the researcher puts forward three recommendations. First, there is need for the public and private universities to source adequate funding from diverse individual funders to world class international donor communities to boost university business operations meant to enhance staff retention. Second, universities need to realise that provision of fair, adequate and internationally- comparable monetary and non-monetary staff retention strategies makes relatively young lecturers and experienced lecturers feel valued, recognised, wanted and rewarded, thereby, toning down regressive staff retention challenges. Third, further studies could be carried out in the same area in other universities other than the studied cases in order to find out the consistency of this study's findings with observations emerging from other universities.

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