

University Leadership and Academic Staff Retention in Kenya

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ABSTRACT

Academic staff retention is a major challenge affecting higher learning institutions globally. The performance and success of any education institution immensely depends on the qualified academic staff it's able to retain. When good academic staff exit, they leave a void that is often costly to fill and challenging to manage, hence corrodes institutional efficiency and effectiveness in its operations. The purpose of this study therefore was to investigate the influence of leadership practices on academic staff retention in public Universities. The study employed ex post facto research design. Simple random sampling was used to select 376 academic staff from 10 public Universities for the study. Data was collected using a closed-ended questionnaire (Likert type scale 1-5). Data was analyzed using weighted averages and simple linear regression analysis. The study concluded that University leadership significantly affects academic staff retention.

KEYWORDS: Academic Staff, Influence, Leadership, Retention

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1. INTRODUCTION

Employee retention refers to the various policies and practices which let the employees stick to an organization for a longer period of time. Research shows that employees leave organizations out of frustration and constant friction with their superiors or other team members (Ongori, 2007).

Batty (2014) noted:

"If employees don't get along with their managers, don't like them or don't respect them, they will leave a company despite a high salary or great benefits. A good manager, no matter the salary, will inspire loyalty". pg.58

Similarly, Kang, Gatling & Kim (2015) indicate that employees leave leaders and not organization, that people leave their bosses and not their jobs. In this regard, Wakabi (2016) refers to leaders as the secret weapon required in keeping employees longer in an organisation. Thus, the level of the leader's effectiveness will help the organisation in the retention of its employees (Adedamola, 2016).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Leadership practices positively enhance worker organizational identification (Kutalik, *et al*, 2010) and employee perception of the organization tone

(Grayson & Alvarez, 2008). In many respects, the administrator's is the most influential individual in the learning institution (KESSHA, 2013). For instance, Pitsoe & Machasia (2012) asserted that administrators leadership shapes organization climate. They cited a study in which employee expressed desire for administrators who was visible, supportive, positive in their interactions with employees, and clear communicators. Leithwood *et al.*, (2008) concluded that almost all successful leaders draw on the same repertoire of basic leadership practices.

In a similar study by Korantwi-Barimah (2017) investigated factors that influence the retention of academic staff in a Ghanaian Technical University. The study adopted a qualitative approach. A purposive sample of nine ($n=9$), out of 252 permanent academic staff of Sunyani Technical University, were selected. A content analysis of the data resulted in clusters of themes that addressed the research objective. The study concluded that leadership has significant positive relationship with academic staff retention. However, Korantwi-Barimah (2017) study was limited to nine (9) academic staff of a particular university. Therefore, the credibility and transferability of the findings was be tested by

conducting similar studies across a larger sample of academic staff in other institutions of learning in a different country. The current study sought to address the gap.

Katuramu, Byarugaba and Wilson (2016) examined the extent to which ethical leadership predicted employee retention in public universities in Uganda. The cross sectional- correlational study involved 304 respondents from public universities in Uganda. Data were collected using a questionnaire whose validity and reliability were tested using Factor Analysis and Cronbach Alpha respectively. Descriptive statistics particularly the mean and multiple regression were used in carrying out data analysis. The results showed that ethical leadership positively significant predictors of employee retention. It was concluded that ethical leadership was important as far as promoting employee retention was concerned. However, the main limitations in Katuramu, Byarugaba and Wilson (2016) study were that, they considered only the two largest public Universities in Uganda. Therefore, there was need to carry out a study and consider other public Universities in order to fill the gap.

3. METHODOLOGY

The study adopted an ex post facto research design. According to McMillan & Schumacher (2010), ex post facto research design is that in which the independent variable or variables have already occurred and in which the researcher starts with the

observation of the dependent variable or variables in retrospect for their possible relations to and effects on the dependent variable or variables. The design enabled the researcher to analyse the phenomenon of university leadership and retention of academic staff which have been associated with public universities in Kenya over the last two decades. The study simple random sampling was used to select 10 public Universities from the total of 23, which was above 30% as recommended by Kothari (2010). Using Yamane's formula, 376 academic staff members were selected from the 10 universities using stratified sampling, basing on schools or academic divisions in the universities.

Closed ended questionnaires were used to obtain data from the academic staff since they were considered effective in obtaining data from a large group of respondents within a relatively short period of time. They also had standardized questions which were expected to yield less biased information. The questionnaire items were measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1- strongly Disagree to 5- strongly Agree.

Data was analyzed using descriptive methods such as percentages, frequencies and means as well inferential statistical technique of simple regression which helped to determine the influence of leadership effectiveness on academic staff retention in Public Universities.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

To determine the influence of university leadership on the retention of the academic staff, the researchers administered a multi-item five-point Likert scale. Respondents were asked to rate on the scale their level of agreement with the various statements indicating the effectiveness of university leadership. Their responses were analyzed using frequency counts and weighted averages and are illustrated in Table 1

Table 1: Academic Staff Opinions on Effectiveness of University Leadership

Statement	SA	A	U	D	SD	$\sum A$	$\frac{\sum A}{\sum SA}$
University leadership is keen on promoting programmes that help to retain academic staff	26	58	51	188	53	376	2.51
I wish to work longer in this University since leadership embraces fairness in relation to opportunities	26	73	68	151	58	376	2.62
Am happy working in this University as management has provided support and established environment of trust to academic staff	40	80	85	98	73	376	2.78
Leadership embrace open door policy on staff members hence am motivated working in this University	17	59	68	154	78	376	2.42
With the current leadership, I am satisfied working in this University	19	98	77	130	52	376	2.74
Cumulative Frequency						2256	16.31

Source: Field Data (2020)

In response to the assertion that university leadership is keen on promoting programmes that help to retain academic staff, 241 respondents representing 64.1% disagreed (score 1 and 2 on the scale), 84 representing 22.3% agreed (score 4 and 5 on the scale) while 51 respondents representing 13.6% were uncertain. With a

weighted mean of 2.51, the results indicate that there is limited promotion of retention programmes by University leadership.

With regard to whether the respondents would wish to work longer in the university since leadership embraces fairness in relation to opportunities, 209 respondents representing 55.6% disagreed (score 1 and 2 on the scale), 99 representing 26.3% agreed (score 4 and 5 on the scale) while 18.1% were uncertain. The weighted mean for the statement was 2.62, implying that the University leadership little demonstrates fairness whenever there are opportunities which works negatively on academic staff retention.

To the assertion that management provided support and established environment of trust to the academic staff, 171 respondents representing 45.5% disagreed (score 1 and 2 on the scale) as compared to 120 representing 31.9% who agreed. Eighty-five respondents representing 22.6% were uncertain. Since less than half of the respondents either disagreed, the study results indicate that the management fairly supports and has established an environment of trust.

On the statement that university leadership embrace open door policy on staff members which motivates them to work in their university, 232 respondents representing 61.7% disagreed (score 1 and 2 on the scale), 76 representing 20.2% agreed (score 4 and 5 on the scale) while 18.1% were uncertain. With a weighted mean of 2.42 it implies that University leadership minimally embraces open door policy on academic staff which negatively affects retention of the academic staff.

To whether the academic staff were satisfied working under the current leadership in the university, 182 respondents representing 48.4% disagreed (score 1 and 2 on the scale), 117 representing 31.1% agreed (score 4 and 5 on the scale) while 20.4% were uncertain. With a weighted mean of 2.74, the results indicate that the academic staff in the public universities was relatively less satisfied with the university leadership.

4.1. AGGREGATION VARIABLE OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF UNIVERSITY LEADERSHIP

Responses to the indicators of University leadership were aggregated to compute a university leadership Index. The scale had values between 5 and 25, such that a value of 5 indicates least ratings about effectiveness of university leadership, while 25 indicates maximum ratings by respondents. Any values above 15, indicates favorable ratings for university leadership. The mean and standard deviation for each variable were computed. Table 2 presents the results.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of Aggregated Variables (N=376)

	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation
University Leadership (X_1)	376	5.00	25.00	15.4840	5.59675

Source: Field Data (2020)

The results presented in Table 2 shows that leadership had a mean of 15.4840 with the other scores deviating from the mean by 5.59675. The mean indicates that university leadership was fairly rated by the academic staff included in the study.

4.2. SIMPLE REGRESSION ANALYSIS

The Simple regression model for this study is presented as follows:

$$Y = \alpha_0 + \alpha_1(X_1) + \epsilon$$

where: - Y is the dependent variable, which is the Academic Staff retention

X_1 -is the University Leadership

α_0, α_1 - are the regression coefficients

ϵ is the error term

To assess the proportion of variation in the dependent variable (academic staff retention) that can be attributed to the independent variables (effectiveness of university leadership), the coefficient of correlation and the coefficient of determination were used. The results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Model Summary^b

Model	R	R Squared	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimates
1	.713 ^a	.508	.5041	.46089

a. Predictors: (Constant), university leadership effectiveness

b. Dependent Variable: Academic Staff Retention

Source: Field Data (2020)

The results displayed in Table 3 indicate that the coefficient of multiple correlations, R was 0.713 which indicates a very strong correlation between the university leadership effectiveness and academic staff retention. Since R^2 was 0.508, the model shows that 50.8% of the variation in academic staff retention for the sample of 376 the academic staff in the universities can be explained by the changes in leadership.

In assessing whether the model can significantly predict the retention of the academic staff, the F -statistic from the ANOVA was used and the results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4: ANOVA^a

Model		SS	Df	MS	F	Sig.
1	Regression	819.633	1	273.211	128.016	.000 ^b
	Residual	793.918	373	2.134		
	Total	1613.551	374			

a. Dependent Variable: Academic Staff Retention

b. Predictors: (Constant), University Leadership Effectiveness.

Source: Field Data (2020)

The results reveal that the independent variable of university leadership can significantly predict the Academic staff retention in the public universities ($F(1,374) = 128.016, p < 0.05$).

In assessing the significance of the simple regression coefficients in the model, the t -test for regression coefficients and the standardized beta values were used. The unstandardized beta coefficients were used as the regression model coefficients. In assessing the significance of the regression coefficients in the model, the t -test for regression coefficients and the standardized beta values were used. The unstandardized regression coefficients, the standardized beta coefficients and t -test values are presented in Table 5.

Table 5: Regression Coefficients (N=376)

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	19.064	.299		63.860	.000
	X ₁	-.067	.016	-.204	-4.096	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Academic Staff Retention

Source: Field Data (2020)

Based on the unstandardized coefficients presented in Table 5, the regression model for the relationship between staff retention and leadership is therefore;

$$Y = 19.064 - 0.067X_1$$

Where; Y is the academic staff retention, 19.419 is the constant i.e. the intention to leave without the influence of the independent variables. The results indicate a negative relationship between academic staff retention and university leadership effectiveness as indicated by the negative regression coefficients of $\alpha_1 = -0.067$.

In testing the significance for the coefficient of the effectiveness of university leadership was determined by a t -test which yielded a value of -4.096, with a p -value of 0.006 which is less than the 0.05 level of significance.

Regression analysis results presented in Table 5 indicate that the effectiveness of university leadership ($\alpha_1 = -0.067, p < 0.05$) contributed significantly to academic staff retention.

5. CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of the study, leadership in public universities have a very significant influence on retention of the academic staff. More qualified and competent academic staff would be retained if the university leadership was more effective and fairer.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the conclusions, the study recommended that; public universities leadership should commit

itself to impartial administrative practices and exercise employee participative management which will go a long way in boosting the morale of academic staff and subsequent retention.

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