The Task of Attraction and Retention of Academic Staff in Nigeria Universities

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Abstract

The salient role of Nigeria universities in the provision and development of human capital required for the social, economic and technological advancement of any nation cannot be over-accentuated. By their inimitable nature, universities are expected to be a repository of the most specialized and skilled intellectuals. They are meant to serve as lumber rooms of knowledge for nurturing the manpower needs of the nation and hence for satisfying the aspirations of the people for a good and humane society. However, the universities in Nigeria are being threatened by their inability to attract and retain specialised, skilled and knowledgeable academic staff due to several crucial but avoidable reasons. This paper probed to identify the factors affecting the attraction and retention of academic staff in Nigeria universities. The problem of brain-drain, gender gap, unattractive salary package and lack of adequate training and development were identified as the problems influencing the attraction and retention of quality academic staff. Provision of good learning and working climate, job flexibility, recognition, rewards and compensation, effective employee training and development were offered as viable strategies to help enhance the attraction and retention of quality academic staff in Nigeria universities.

Keywords: employee attraction, employee retention, recruitment, selection, Nigeria universities

1. Introduction

The world of work and organization has become increasingly demanding and turbulent. Thus, level of competition among organizations has tremendously increased (Burke & Cooper, 2005). Most organizations today can facsimile technology, manufacturing processes, products, strategy, etc. However, human resource management (HRM) practices and organization are difficult to copy, thereby representing a unique competitive advantage (Pfeffer, 1994, 1998). Increased global competition coupled with enhanced customer expectations means that the growth, or even survival, of a firm is difficult. It is no longer sufficient to be effective in selling a particular product or service or to rely on past reputation (Newell, 2005). To be successful within the competitive environment, organizations will have to enhance their organizational capability. HR professionals and HRM practices will be required to create value by increasing organizational competitiveness (Ferris et al., 1999).

Organizations need to respond to a rapidly changing global environment. Continued success is, thus, dependent on attracting and retaining high-quality individuals who can respond effectively to this changing environment (Newell, 2005). This denotes that there can be 'wrong' people; individuals who are a liability rather than an asset because they do not contribute to organizational success and might even cause some damages to the organization. This occurs because there are differences between individuals, which influence how they perform some particular jobs (Newell, 2005).

Hiring competent people is of supreme importance and this is reliant on effective recruitment and selection procedures, which aim to select the 'right' individuals and reject the 'wrong' ones (Newell, 2005). The importance of this should not be underestimated because a poor recruitment decision can cost an employer an amount equal to 30 per cent of the employee's first-year earnings (Hacker, 1997). These costs can include: lower productivity; potential loss of clients; training costs; advertising costs; recruitment fees and redundancy packages (Smith and Graves, 2002).

Furthermore, attraction and retention involves making predictions about future behaviour so that decisions can be made about who will be most suitable for a particular job. Retention means the organization's capability to keep its employees to work and continue in the organization for a long period of time. As recruitment is the primary mechanism used by the institutions to attract quality applicants, this discipline is receiving increased recognition in the popular and academic press as the institutions seek to establish a competitive advantage over competitors (such as the new generation private universities) in response to shifts in labour market conditions (Carlson, Connerley and Mechan, 2002).

Presently, Nigeria educational institutions are facing challenges on several fronts in their efforts to remain competitive. These include the need to increase its productivity (graduating employable students), the prospects of expanding into global markets (successfully competing with their counterparts abroad), new technological developments (aligning with new technologies of teaching), responding to changes in the marketplace (aligning with strategic changes in the education sector), containing costs, developing a skilled, trained and flexible workforce and bringing about significant organizational change. These challenges are emerging in the context of changing needs of the workforce, changing attitudes in the broader society and heightened legal requirements (Cappelli, 1999). These challenges are making it both more important and more difficult for the institutions to be successful. There is now a greater emphasis on organizational results in terms of its productivity and output (quality of students).

Not surprisingly, many educational institutions in Nigeria are looking for ways to improve their performance. The past decade has produced research evidence supporting the critical role human resource management plays in the success of an organization. This evidence has been generated in a variety of different types of organizations including educational, manufacturing, professional services, health care, etc. (Becker et al., 2001).

At the same time, however, many of the traditional methods of employee attraction and retention in Nigeria universities are being challenged by the need for organisations to address the increased complexity, greater ambiguity and rapid pace of change in the contemporary environment. This piece therefore deemed it necessary to discuss the task of attraction and retention of academic staff in Nigeria educational institutions, limiting its scope to Nigerian Universities.

2. Concept of Employee Attraction

Rynes (1991) defined employee attraction as getting potential candidates to view the organization as a positive place to work. This may include a number of components, such as having a positive affective attitude toward an organization, viewing it as a desirable entity, and exerting effort to work for it (Aiman-Smith, Bauer, & Cable, 2001). Measures of the attraction construct have raised a number of diverse operationalisation including general affect, wanting to interview with an organization, actually interviewing with an organization, job pursuit intentions, probability or indications to accept a job offer, and actually accepting a job offer (Ehrhart & Ziegert, 2005; Barber, 1998).

Attraction also refers to activities soliciting candidate inquiries. This is mainly done through advertising vacancies with the hope that they will attract candidates meeting the requisite criteria. This method tends to be quite passive, as the recruiter relies on the advert to do most of the leg work. An increasingly popular attraction tool is the use of effective employer brand strategies. This usually involves creating an employer brand website designed specifically to create a talent pool of candidates registering into an online talent pool. While this is a great method to present an organization's brand as an employer, it still relies on candidates taking action, or having a motivation to investigate employment opportunities at the organization.

The earliest research on organization attraction was conducted by Vroom (1966), who examined it as a function of instrumentality perceptions. The criterion in Vroom's study was a single-item measure of how attractive each hypothetical organization was to the prospective job seeker (Highhouse, Lievens & Sinar, 2003). Thus, this initial study assessed organizational attraction as a general company-specific attitude. Several years later, Singh (1973), applied information integration theory to organization attraction using a single item assessing likelihood of accepting a job with the company (i.e., "How much would you like to accept this job?"). In keeping with the principle of compatibility, Singh's item assessed attitude at the level of the specific behavior in question (i.e., organization choice).

3. Employee Retention

Retention is a complex concept and there is no single recipe for keeping employees with a company. In literature, retention has been viewed as an obligation to continue to do business or exchange with a particular company on an ongoing basis (Zineldin, 2000, Sinha & Sinha, 2012). A more detailed and recent definition for the concept of retention

is customer liking, identification, commitment, trust, readiness to recommend, and repurchase intentions, with the first four being emotional-cognitive retention constructs, and the last two being behavioral intentions (Stauss et al., 2001). Studies have also indicated that retention is driven by several key factors, which ought to be managed congruently: organizational culture, communication, strategy, pay and benefits, flexible work schedule and career development systems (Logan, 2000).

Retention can be seen as a voluntary move by an organization to create an environment which engages employees for a long term. According to Samuel and Chipunza (2009), the most important purpose of retention is to look for ways to prevent the capable workers from quitting the organization as this could have negative effect on productivity and profitability. The view that the main purpose of retention is primarily for organizational gains is similarly viewed by Humphreys et al. (2009), who in describing the concept, placed the focus of retention in terms of "some notion of adequacy or sufficiency of length of service…", which can be measured in terms of a return on the costs of investment associated with training and recruitment or the effects on patient care that are considered to be optimal.

Ivanovic (2007) presented a definition of retention by The Dictionary of Human Resources and Personnel Management. According to him, retention is the process of keeping the loyalty of existing employees and persuading them not to work for another company or organisation.

In addressing the multi-dimensional concept of retention, Cascio (2003), perceived retention as initiatives which the management takes to prevent employees from leaving the organization. The issues which the latter further proposed are employees being rewarded for doing their jobs effectively, ensuring that the relationship between employees and managers are harmonious, and maintaining a working atmosphere which is safe and healthy.

Employee retention can also mean any effort by a business to maintain a working environment which supports current staff in remaining with the company. Many employee retention policies are aimed at addressing the various needs of employees to enhance their job satisfaction and reduce the substantial costs involved in hiring and training new staff.

Employee retention issues are emerging as the most critical workforce management challenges of the immediate future. Researches have shown that in the future, successful organizations will be those which adapt their organizational behavior to the realities of the current work environment where longevity and success depend upon innovation, creativity and flexibility (Sinha & Sinha, 2012). In fact, the dynamics of the work environment will have to reflect a diverse population comprised of individuals whose motivations, beliefs and value structures differ vastly from the past and from one another. This phenomenon is especially true in light of current economic uncertainty and following corporate downsizings when the impact of losing critical employees increases exponentially (Caplan and Teese, 1997).

4. Overview of the History of Nigeria Universities

University education in Nigeria commenced with the establishment of the University College, Ibadan (U.C.I.) in January, 1948 as a College of the metropolitan University of London. The University College became independent of London University in 1962 and became a full-fledged University of Ibadan (U.I.) (Ogunu, 1990).

Following the Ashby Commission Report (Ashby, 1960) four universities were established between 1960 and 1962 in the following sequence:

    i.   The University of Nigeria, Nsukka - Created by the Statute of the Government of the former Eastern Region in 1955 and opened in 1960;

   ii.   The University of Ife, now Obafemi Awolowo University. The University was not recommended by Ashby. It was founded in 1961 by the Government of the former Western Region. It first enrolled students in 1962.

  iii.   The Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria - founded in 1962 by the government of the former Northern Region, and

  iv.   The University of Lagos established in 1962 by the Federal Government (Ogunu, 1990).

In 1970, the Mid-West State (formerly Mid-West Region, now Bendel State) which was carved out of the Western Region established the Mid-West Institute of Technology (M.I.T.). The Institute was converted to a university status - the University of Benin - in 1972 and was handed over to the Federal Government in 1975. The Third National Development Plan (1975 - 1980) made provision for the establishment of seven more universities to be located in States where there were none at that time. This gave birth to the 'Seven Sisters' or Second Generation Universities in 1975. The universities were established as follows:

    i.   The University of Calabar, which began as the Calabar Campus of the University of Nigeria in 1973

ii. The University of Jos, founded as a Campus of the University of Ibadan in 1971.

iii. The University of Maiduguri, 1975.

iv. The University of Sokoto, 1975.

v. The University of Ilorin, which was a former Campus of the University of Ibadan but became a full university in 1977 after becoming a University College in 1975.

vi. University of Port Harcourt which took off initially as a University College in 1975 and affiliated to the University of Lagos. It became a full-fledged university in 1977.

vii. Bayero University, Kano, which started as Northern Government owned Abdullahi Bayero College in 1961, became Bayero University College of Ahmadu Bello university in 1962, and a full university on 1st The 1979 (Ogunu, 1990).

The constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria" placed university education on the Concurrent Legislative list. That meant that, apart from the Federal Government, State Governments that wished could establish their own universities as was the practice before 1975 when university education was put on the Exclusive Legislative list by the then Military Government (Ogunu, 1990). Other Federal universities established since then are:

1. Tafawa Balewa University, Bauchi

2. Federal university of Technology, Akure,

3. University of agriculture, Makurdi

4. University of Agriculture, Abeokuta

5. Federal University of Technology, Yola

6. Federal University of Technology Minna

7. Federal University of Technology, Owerri (Ogunu, 1990).

Thus, altogether, Nigeria had, as at December 1989, twenty Federal universities and eight State universities.

Recently, licenses have been granted to individuals, corporate bodies and religious bodies to establish private universities in the country. The National Universities Commission (NUC), established in 1962 as a parastatal under the Federal Ministry of Education (FME), is the major accreditation body that enforces uniform standard and sets admissions capacity of every university in Nigeria.

As a coordinating body, the Commission ensures it discharges its responsibilities by recruiting adequate and relevant man power and appeals to the Universities for their sustained support and understanding. The Commission also relies on support from the Federal Government, State Governments and other stakeholders in its bid to improve on the quality of tertiary education and graduates of the nation's university system (NUC, 2014).

Presently, according to NUC records, there are there are 40 Federal Universities in Nigeria, of which 31 are Conventional Federal Universities, 3 Federal Universities of Agriculture and 6 Federal Universities of Technology, 39 State Universities and 50 Private Universities. Below are the lists of Nigeria Federal, State and Private Universities.

5. Approaches to Employee Attraction

As mentioned earlier, employee attraction involves getting potential candidates to view the organization as a positive place to work. This may include a number of components, such as having a positive affective attitude toward an organization, viewing it as a desirable entity, and exerting effort to work for it. The first step in attracting employees in organisations is to analyse recruitment strengths and weaknesses.

➢ **Analyse recruitment strengths and weaknesses of the Employer/Organisation**

Using the words of Armstrong (2009), attracting candidates is primarily a matter of identifying, evaluating and using the most appropriate sources of applicants. However, in cases where hitches in attracting or retaining candidates are being met or anticipated, it may be necessary to carry out a pilot study of the factors that are likely to attract or repel candidates, i.e., the strengths and weakness of the organization as an employer.

➢ **Analyse the Requirement**

The second step of employee attraction in organisations involves the analysis of the job requirements. First it is necessary to establish how many jobs/vacancies have to be filled and by when these vacancies should be filled. Then

turn to an existing role profile and person specification or, if not available or out of date, draw up new ones that set out information on responsibilities and competency requirements. This information can be analysed to determine the required education, qualifications and experience (Armstrong, 2009).

The next step is to consider where suitable candidates are likely to come from; the companies, jobs or education establishments they are in; and the parts of the country where they can be found. Next, define the terms and conditions of the job (pay and benefits).

Finally, refer to the analysis of strengths and weaknesses to assess what is likely to attract good candidates to the job or the organization so the most can be made of these factors when advertising the vacancy or reaching potential applicants in other ways. Consider also what might put them off, for example the location of the job, so that objections can be anticipated. Analyse previous successes or failures to establish what does or does not work (Armstrong, 2009).

➤ **Identify Sources of Applicants**

The third crucial step of employee attraction is to identify the various sources of applicants. In doing this, firstly, consideration should be given to internal candidates in the organisation. It may also be advisable to persuade former employees to return to the organization or obtain suggestions from existing employees (referrals). If these approaches do not produce the anticipated results, there are still other major sources of applicants and they include advertising, online recruiting, agencies and job centres, consultants, recruitment process outsourcing providers and direct approaches to educational establishments (Armstrong, 2009).

➤ **Advertisement**

Advertising has traditionally been the most obvious method of attracting candidates and it is still very significant, although many organizations are outsourcing recruitment to agencies or consultants or using online recruitment. Armstrong (2009) stated that a conventional advertisement will have the following aims.

Generate candidates: attract a sufficient number of good candidates at minimum cost.

• Attract attention: it must compete for the attention of potential candidates against other employees.

• Create and maintain interest: it has to communicate in an attractive and interesting way information about the job, the company and the terms and conditions of employment.

• Stimulate action: the message needs to be conveyed in a way that will prompt a sufficient number of replies from candidates with the right qualifications for the job (Armstrong, 2009).

6. Factors Affecting Employee Attraction and Retention in Nigerian Universities

A number of factors have been assembled to give explanation of the reasons why employees leave the university for others, or leaving the country in rare cases. Some of the reasons are inappropriate hiring practices, unprofessional management style, lack of competitive compensation system, lack of interesting work, lack of job security, lack of timely promotion, inadequate training and development opportunities and an unhealthy working environment. Other major reasons worthy of discussion include:

➤ **The problem of Brain Drain**

Experience shows that the problem of brain drain is not novel or unknown in academic literatures, since very often reference is made to this phenomena in discussing manpower problems facing developing countries. Brain drain is concerned with the reverse transfer of expertise from the "drained" country to the "draining" country/countries. This problem is now suffuse in the African continent as the pangs of its impact is felt across the region.

There are many Nigerian talents in the developed countries, which could play a vital role in Nigeria's university development. This movement of trained personnel from Nigeria to other countries (because of better opportunities) is known as brain drain.

The outflow of professionals has adversely affected Nigeria's economic and human resource development since the 1970s. Higher educational and research facilities, job opportunities, better work environment and living standards, and higher income lure Nigerian emigrants. Unfair recruitment policies, faulty criteria of evaluating foreign diplomats, and underemployment at home act as the push factors. Human resource deficiency has reduced public sector efficiency in areas, such as education, technology and medicine.

According to Ng'ethe et al (2012), the issue of staff attrition and retention of academic staff in developing countries like Nigeria has been less documented in the literature. This is because the issue tends to be subsumed under the

general category of brain drain without particular attention being devoted to it (Mihyo, 2007). In the African context, much of the expertise base of universities has been eroded to the extent that not enough teaching capacity is available to provide quality training for new generation of citizens. Many Nigerian universities are negatively affected by the fact that some African students who are studying abroad or current faculty members who are sent abroad to pursue further education, do not return because of pull and push factors (Tettey, 2006; Ng'ethe et al, 2012). Osalusi et al (2010), observed that brain drain was a phenomenon that had afflicted the Nigerian University system most severely in the 1980's through to the 21st century and that country had lost its experienced academic to even smaller African countries such as Ghana and Rwanda and bigger countries such as Britain, America, France and Germany.

Locally, qualified academic staff have resigned from Nigerian public universities and secured better paying jobs abroad. Brain drain among the academic staff is real within the public universities and this affects staff retention. Internal brain drain is also rampant with movement of highly skilled academics to other sectors in the country (Ng'ethe et al, 2012).

➢ **The Gender Gap**

The recruitment and selection exercise in Nigeria universities is highly bureaucratized and have little or no representation of females in its decision making process. This affirms Kaminer's (1997) assertion that the institutionalization and maintenance of segregation in the workplace is as a result of bureaucratic personnel policies. Evidences from Nigeria points to the fact that universities are masculinist institutions which reproduce a patriarchal order. This suggests that universities reproduce a pervasive masculine and patriarchal culture which favour the full participation of males and acts as impediments to females. It also indicates that the culture of universities can sometimes be indifferent to the needs of women. This reduces the ability of women to flourish as full and equal members of the academic community (Ogbogu & Bisiriyu, 2012).

This was confirmed by Bennet (2002), when he asserted that a glass ceiling of unstated norms and distorted expectations inherent in the patriarchal culture of universities hinder women from gaining access into academia and maximizing their potentials. This can negatively impact on the employment prospects of women as well as have significant long-term effects in shaping their self-esteem, career aspirations and sense of belonging in academia. Universities are expected to be sensitive and responsive to gender issues so that they can successfully attract and retain sufficient female academics (Ogbogu, 2006; Ogbogu & Bisiriyu, 2012).

Olubor (2006) affirms that women form a minority of university teachers in Nigeria and this produces negative consequences for the university system because it deprives universities access to some of the country's best minds for teaching and research. It also deprives female students who are potential future academics sufficient role models who understand the special challenges faced by women on campuses (Ogbogu & Bisiriyu, 2012).

Besides, one of the most serious gaps that African universities need to close if African countries are to fully utilize their human potential is the gender gap. While the proportion of female staff in various institutions has improved over the years, it is clear from Fig. 2 that they still constitute only a small fraction of academic staff at most universities. Even when and though their numbers are increasing, the increments remain minimal. Research carried out Tettey (2010) on 'Challenges of Developing and Retaining: The Next Generation of Academics: Deficits in Academic Staff Capacity at African Universities', revealed that at the University of Ghana, the proportion of women academic staff increased by four percent from 2000 to 2008 while the University of Ibadan recorded a two percent growth in their numbers over five years. Stellenbosch University was the leader of the group, with its female staff going up by seven percent from its 2001 level, to 41% in 2007.
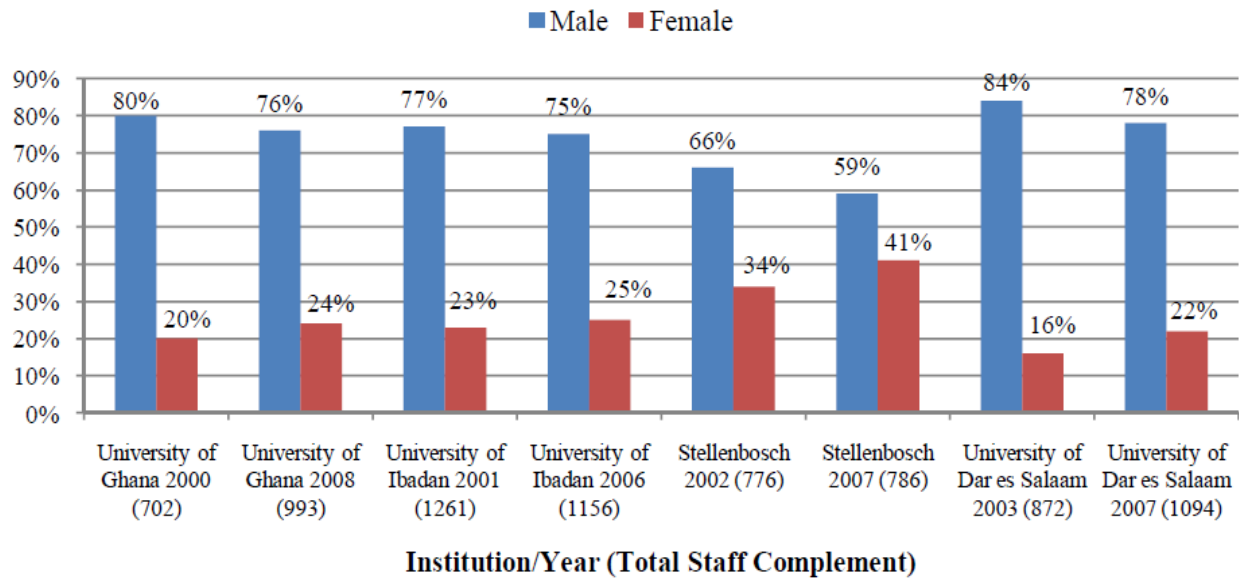
Figure 1. Institutional comparisons of total academic staff complement over time by gender

Source: Tettey, W., J. (2010) *Challenges of Developing and Retaining: The Next Generation of Academics: Deficits in Academic Staff Capacity at African Universities*. Alberta Canada: Faculty of Communication and Culture University of Calgary Calgary.

7. Strategies for Enhancing Employee Attraction and Retention in Nigeria Universities

Agrela, et al (2008) states the need to focus on the factors that affects retention leading to growth and success of organizations. Studies suggest that retention strategies, which effectively satisfy the needs of all employees consequently enhances the ability for organisations to adapt more effectively to ongoing organizational change (Gale, 2006). Research shows that trends redefining modern retention strategies go beyond the traditional salary and benefits package and compensation (Feldman, 2000), embracing employee motivation, as one of the key factors to cater to the diversity and long stay of the workforce in the organization (Thomas, 2000). These attraction and retention strategies include;

➢   Provision of Good Learning & Working Climate

Since learning and development opportunities appear crucial for the retention of talented employees, Nigeria Universities must establish a supportive learning and working climate (Walker, 2001; Arnold, 2005; Hytter, 2007). The concept "learning and working climate" is derived from previous research (Abrams et al., 2008 etc). In general it refers to the environment wherein employees both learn and work. More specifically, the concept could be described by referring to: guidance and appreciation at work; pressure of work; the amount of empowerment and the responsibility that employees experience; choice in job tasks and development; provision of challenging and meaningful work; and advancement and development opportunities (Sinha & Sinha, 2012). Results from previous research show that the appreciative approach, operationalised through an appreciative learning and working climate, positively influences employee retention in universities (Sinha & Sinha, 2012).

➢   Job Flexibility

Job flexibility is vital for retaining employees in any organisation (Boomer Authority, 2009). Researchers describe the importance of employment flexibility such as scheduling variations that better accommodate individual work times, workloads, responsibilities, and locations around family responsibilities (Cunningham, 2002; Pleffer, 2007). Studies also show that "flexibility" empowers individuals to facilitate a healthier balance between work and personal obligations, something that appeals to all ages of employees (Sinha & Sinha, 2012).

➢   Recognition, Rewards and Compensation

Many studies have shown what implications employee compensation, rewards and recognition have on turnover, attraction and retention (Becker and Huselid 1999, Cho et al. 2006, Milman 2003, Milman and Ricci 2004, Walsh

and Taylor 2007). Furthermore, numerous research studies found that employee commitment can be promoted by highly competitive wage systems and thus resulting in the attraction and retention of a superior labor force (Becker and Huselid 1999, Guthrie 2001). Also, most of the managers believe that the prime retention factor is money and many employees mentioned the reason of better pay or higher compensation for leaving one employer for another (Mathis and Jackson 2003). Compensation is said to play a fundamental role in attracting, retaining and motivating academic staff (Swanepoel et al., 2003). This will enhance the level of employee attraction and retention in Nigeria universities.

➢ Cost Effectiveness

Studies supports the conclusion that organizations providing cost effective job flexibility options benefit from satisfying the needs of all employees, independent of age, which allows for the reallocation of expenses related to recruitment, work space changes, sick time, absenteeism, and commuting costs (Agrela, et al., 2008; Boomer Authority, 2009; Cunningham, 2002). Consequently, studies indicate that there is a link between cost-effective "flexibility" choices and advanced levels of job satisfaction, accuracy, productivity, recruitment, and employee retention (Boomer Authority, 2009;

Cunningham, 2002; Prenda & Stahl, 2001. Eyster, et al (2008) state organizations can cost-effectively fulfil the needs for job flexibility options to promote employee retention. This factor is not visible in some of the Nigeria universities as most academic staff are not paid transfer or relocation allowances and other benefits.

➢ Training and Development

Organizations that focus extensively on developing newly hired and old talent through continuous training will be in a much stronger position to retain the most talented employees, thus becoming an employer of choice (Boxall & Purcell, 2003). Also, according to the research of Matlay (2010), companies that want to hang on to the graduates that they have and continue to attract the best should look to their training programs. His research also showed that training was considered key not just to newly working graduates but to final year students. He perceived that over 90 per cent of them believe that organizations that continue to invest in their people will come out of the recession stronger. In his view, whilst they acknowledge that training budgets may have shrunk and will view companies claiming the opposite with some scepticism, they demand honesty about training opportunities from employers during the interview process. Successful attraction and retention programs in Nigeria universities should incorporate training and development in an effort to be able to retain their employees.

8. Conclusion

One of the most important activities for the success of an organization is the attraction of high-quality applicants (Rynes & Barber, 1990). Indeed, it has been noted that the ultimate cost of failure to attract applicants may be termed as organizational failure (Barber & Roehling, 1993). The recognition of the importance of a company's human resources has increased in recent years such that attraction of quality individuals is now viewed as a major source of competitive advantage.

Managers today recognize that an organization's staff is its most critical assets. Employees are investments that will, if effectively managed and developed, provide long-term rewards to the organization in the form of greater productivity. Employees, who have the right qualifications and adequate experiences in the business, can contribute a lot in helping the management team operate the organization well.

Staff retention is of interest to employers because of the implications of high staff turnover. Attraction and retention of academic staff in Nigeria universities need to be managed and several factors have been identified as areas that have an effect on attraction and retention of staff; remuneration, staff training development, enhanced career opportunity, improved work environment, performance management, etc.

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