

Academic Staff Mobility in Tanzania's Higher Learning Institutions: Understanding the Push and Pull Factors

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Abstract

This study aimed to understand the push and pull factors for employees' mobility in higher learning institutions. Specifically, the study anticipated to 1) determine the trend of employees' mobility in higher learning institutions, 2) explore the factors for employees' mobility in higher learning institutions and 3) recommend how higher learning institutions may devise motivation and retention strategies to minimise employee mobility. The study employed an exploratory case study design to allow the use of various qualitative data collection methods and tools. Purposive sampling was used to obtain respondents from four selected higher-learning institutions. Data collected from interviews were analysed using NVivo 12 Plus computer-based software. Findings indicate that the push and pull factors for academic staff mobility in the selected higher learning institutions in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, are multiple, including workplace restructuring, institutional politics, failure to meet the required academician's needs and demands, health-related factors, good salary pay, need to join their families after a long period of staying away, work motivation, friendly welfare policies and good working climate. The study recommends having different employee retention strategies ranging from good governance/leadership, friendly human resource-related policies that are objectively implemented, flexible management that are open for discussion, and views to fair motivational packages.

Keywords: Academic staff, higher learning institutions, push and pull factors.

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1.0 Introduction

The quality and quantity of academics in higher learning institutions (HLIs) are fundamental in achieving their objectives hence the need to have strategies for attracting and retaining qualified staff. From the perspective of human resources theory, if an organisation wants to survive in a changing environment, it must attract and retain limited human resources to achieve a competitive advantage (Pienaar & Bester, 2008; Chen, 2001). Literature indicates that several factors attract academic staff to other institutions or stay in their organisations, such as the supportive organisational culture, clear understanding of HLIs' goals and objectives for their establishment and working environment that support academic staff's job performance (Abdulsalam & Mawoli, 2012). Workload, remuneration and other incentives such as promotion procedures and staff development programmes, assigning responsibilities and equitable avenues for growth are equally fundamental in retaining staff (Ganguli and Matar, 2016). Workplace restructuring and leadership styles also determine the decision for the employee to stay or move to other institutions (Chew, 2004; Mahnegar & Far, 2015; Lee & Teo, 2005). For instance, Mahnegar & Far (2015) argue that the quality of an employee's relationship with their immediate managers elongates the employee's stay in an organisation.

Tanzania has made rapid progress in the higher education system, from one university in 1961 to about 43 full-fledged universities, university colleges/campuses and 471 technical education and training (TCU, 2018; NACTVET, 2018). Academic staff's movement to newly formed HLIs with the hope of professionally growing faster has consequently led to a shortage in academia, making some resort to being part-time staff. Evidence from **Tanzania Higher Learning Institutions Trade Union (THTU)** report (2017) and TCU (2016) indicates massive shortages in different HLIs as a result of the expansion and mobility to central government positions. One of the challenges of the HLIs is shortage of academic staff, leading to increased moonlighting resulting in poor-quality teaching due to the staff being over-deployed (Mbwette & Ngirwa, 2012). The failure to retain academic staff ranges from subsequent recruiting expenses; disruptions of course offerings; and discontinuities in departmental and student planning, especially to those staff who leave their jobs in the mid-semester period, to loss of graduate student advisors. There is also an impact on the quality of services and the institution's image to the remaining academic staff due the gap increasing workload during the replacement process and failure to maintain the productive organisational culture. Studies have also reported other challenges that hinder African academics from being productive in research, unlike their counterparts in developed countries. For instance, it has been argued that academic

staff in most African higher education institutions work beyond standard working hours in poor working conditions and receive poor remuneration (Teichler & Hohle, 2013; Bigirimana, 2016). This calls for effective strategies for acquiring and retaining academic professionals and putting in place work-life policies that are sufficiently conducive for motivating and retaining them. At a national level, the treasury issued a harmonised scheme of service for academic staff in public universities and constituent colleges in 2014 to remove any discrepancies in HLIs. The Tanzania Commission for Universities (TCU) has henceforth been mandated to set minimum criteria to standardise the academic staff recruitment, appointment, appraisal and promotion for a harmonised and better coordinated human resources management system for universities (TCU, 2014). On the other hand, the National Council for Technical and vocational Education and Training (NACTVET) coordinates technical education and training provisions covering all tertiary education and training institutions other than universities and their affiliated colleges. Altogether, TCU and NACTVET have put in place policies that guide the academic institutions they govern, demanding them to have policies and guidelines that fulfil or exceed the minimum criteria for academic progression and standards (TCU, 2019; NACTVET, 2018).

Despite these guidelines, academic staff seem to be dissatisfied in some of these institutions. This is evidenced by local mobility from one institution to another, let alone those who join politics, senior administrative government jobs, donor-funded projects and international non-governmental organisations. Mkulu et al. (2017) concluded that poor administrative strategies have resulted in low academic staff retention. Utmost, mobility is mostly within one category: those who move from one university to another and those who move to non-university institutions. This is probably due to differences in some requirements and remuneration differentials. For instance, the required Grade Point Average (GPA) for a Master's Degree is 4.0 for universities, while for non-universities it is 3.5 (TCU 2019; NACTVET 2018). On the same footing, remuneration for universities is slightly higher than for non-university institutions. Generally, if this exodus is not checked, it will make some HLIs underperform as they decline in terms of teaching and research workforce and a subsequent heavy teaching load for those who remain. While studies on the factors that influence local mobility in Tanzania are limited, the gap created by those who move from one institution to another is hitting hard on many HLIs. Considerable studies on academic staff retention have focused on general job satisfaction (Simon, 2019), academic staff motivation and retention in higher-learning institutions (Matimwa & Ochumbo, 2019) and academic staff mobility in Kenya (Wamukoya, 2014).

Furthermore, despite the issued harmonised scheme in 2014 (as reviewed in 2022) and the requirement to have in place human resource-related policies for retaining academic and supporting staff, several questions on the fast-growing trend of employee mobility from one HLI to another or from non-higher HLI to HLI remain unanswered. This calls for the need to research to explain the phenomenon. Thus, the major purpose of this research was to characterise and analyse the push and pull factors for employees' mobility in four selected HLIs. Such mobility is growing literally due to available policies permitting public sector employees to move from one institution to another. This study questioned whether, among others, push and pull factors are mitigated by workplace policies and the working environment.

1.1 Theoretical perspective

This study is anchored on the Equity theory by Adam 1965 and Herzberg's Two-factor Theory (1966). The equity theory of employee motivation describes the relationship between how fairly an employee perceives how he/she is being treated and how hard he/she is motivated to work. The equity theory is classified into two forms: distributive equity and procedural equity. Distributive equity is concerned with fairness, with which people feel rewarded in accordance with others. In contrast, the procedural equity concerns employees' perception of the fairness with which the organisation's procedures are being operated. The workplace's equity structure is based on the ratio of inputs to outcomes. Inputs at the workplace may include education, intelligence, experience, commitment, tolerance, personal sacrifice, loyalty, ability, job effort, and skills, while outcomes are pay, satisfying supervision seniority benefits, fringe benefits, job security, recognition, reputation, sense of achievement, working conditions, monotony, fate, and uncertainty (Adams, 1965). The Equity theory proposes that when a state of inequity is perceived, the individual experiences a state of distress (Walster & Walster, 1973). This deplorable state will move individuals to take action to restore equity (Lerner & Holmes, 1973). Such a change may include altering inputs, changing their outcomes, distorting perceptions of self and others, choosing a different referent, or leaving the organisation. However, as postulated in the theory, the perception of equity or inequality is a function of specific inputs and outcomes and the overarching system that determines those inputs and outputs. For example, the entire system may be perceived as unfair, so push to move to another institution of similar calibre.

Herzberg's Two-factor Theory postulates that good feelings are generally related to job content (motivators), whereas bad feelings are associated with job context (hygiene factor). Motivators involve factors built in the job, such as achievement, recognition, responsibility and advancement. Hygiene factors are extrinsic to the

job, such as interpersonal relationships, salary, supervision and company policy (Herzberg, 1966). Despite critics, Herzberg's theory of motivation is the most popular in studying job satisfaction which in turn would influence the retention of employees in organisations. Hygiene factors fulfil "the need to avoid unpleasantness", while the motivation factors meet "the need of the individual for self-growth and self-actualisation" (Alshmemri & Phillip, 2017). The relevance of Herzberg's theory to this study revolves around the need for HLIs to consider motivational and hygienic factors such as working conditions, organisational policy, relationships with supervisors/peers, money, work security, recognition, achievement and growth. These factors would, in turn, retain or push academic staff to other HLIs.

2.0 Methodology

The study used qualitative methods whereby data were collected using in-depth interviews (Saunders et al. 2019). The employed approach is very generic in social sciences and helps to obtain a more detailed perspective and facilitates the verification of the validity of the collected information (Blaxter et al., 1999, p. 77). Data were gathered from two sources in order to give a realistic account of reality through triangulation of the data (Bryman 2012, p. 377).

Research Design

A cross-sectional study design was adopted whereby qualitative methods were employed to collect data to understand different aspects of the research problem in selected HLIs. Edmonds and Kennedy (2017) contend that "... the cross-sectional design allows the researcher to collect data at one point in time... Basic descriptive statistical analyses are typically used to summarize data." (p. 135). A subset of the population from four HLIs, therefore, was selected, and from these individuals, data were collected to answer our research questions. A total of 20 participants were engaged in the interviews which were conducted to understand the push and pull factors for employees' mobility in HLIs.

Study Area

The study was conducted in four selected HLIs in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. The choice of these institutions took into consideration various factors, including an institution having at least three employees who had transferred to it from another higher learning institution within Tanzania's higher education sector. The on-going trend of employee mobility in HLIs had never been an institutional culture in Tanzania's higher education sector; however, there is evidence of transferred employees working in HLIs in Dar es Salaam city. In recent years, HLIs have experienced such remarkable mobility of academic and non-academic staff as one

of the workplace restructuring initiatives. It is worth noting that the choice of HLIs based in Dar es Salaam was because most of such institutions (both universities and non-universities) are there.

Sample and Sampling Design

This study involved a population sample of transferred employees and management team members, including Human Resource Officers (HROs) in four selected HLIs of Tanzania Mainland. Therefore, purposive sampling technique was employed as the best approach to reaching the target sample. Purposive sampling was used to reach 12 transferred employees, four (4) top management team members and four (4) HROs who were then engaged in interviews. HROs possess handy information about all employees in an institution; they are custodians of the employees' information and personal files. On the other hand, top management members were in a good position to understand 'who gets in and why since they are the ones who recommend the employees' transfers at the institutional level. Accordingly, the transferred employees were involved in the study because of their familiarity with the topic of the study since they were in a position to explain the on-going workplace restructuring and explain the push and pull factors for transfer.

Purposive sampling technique was more appropriate for this qualitative research since the study participants were chosen for specific conditions. Therefore, the selected participants from institutions HLI-1, HLI-2, HLI-3, and HLI-4 were engaged in the study for a particular goal in mind. The selected sample of 20 participants included members of top management (4), human resource officers (4) and transferred employees (12) as indicated in Figure 1.

Data Collection

This research article is based on empirical data collected through interviews collected between August and September 2022 in four selected HLIs available in Dar es Salaam city. The focus of investigation was the transferred employees into HLIs. Data were collected from four selected HLIs using in-depth interviews.

Data Analysis

The transcribed data from interviews were imported into NVivo computer-based software whereas thematic data analysis was performed. The analysis involved the use of labels and categories as a way of organising and analysing qualitative data (Ritchie, 2013). The first step in analysing the data was to identify broader themes such as factors for employees' mobility. In the first round of coding, we analysed any emerged factor related to employees' mobility in HLIs. In the second round we categorised the labels containing push and pull factors by considering the

set dimensions. In this round it became clear that extra labels were required to identify closely related issues to the employee's mobility factors. Moreover, the second round employed cross-sectional coding, which provides a systematic overview of the scope of the data to help make connections (Ritchie 2013, 203). This helped analyse the decisions to move from one institution to another as caused by either push or pull factors.

Ethical consideration

The identities of four HLIs involved in this study were not revealed for confidentiality reasons. Hence, they are referred to as Institution HLI-1, HLI-2, HLI-3 and HLI-4. Similarly, participants in this study were identified anonymously using special codes. The higher learning institutions operate in autonomous contexts with their status quo. In contrast, employees in these institutions remain significant and required conducive environment for institutional growth and survival, particularly in teaching, research, and consultancy.

In-depth Interviews

In-depth interviews were the main qualitative method for data collection. All interviews were semi-structured and conducted physically between the researcher and interviewer. The interviews in this study were guided by the research's main themes and sub-themes (Arthur and Nazroo 2008). These themes distinguished different topic categories whereas the interviews commenced with introductory topics for the interviewee with the purpose of easing the start of the interview. After each interview we mirrored on the topic guide to see whether any adjustments were required with regard to the sequence of the categories with their content. The duration of each interview was approximately 25 minutes, some of them 20 minutes and some of them 15 minutes. The interviews took place at interviewees' offices and the researchers were of the view that always people feel comfortable expressing themselves freely at the places they are used.

Through interviews, data were obtained from employees transferred to the four (4) selected HLIs and from Human Resource Officers and a representative from top institutional management. To understand the push and pull factors, the selected participants provided valid and relevant information that answered the research questions. Our methodology was, therefore, guided by the matrix in Table 1).

Table 1: Research Methodology Matrix (RMM)

Objective	Research Question	Data Required	Data Provider	Data presentation and analysis
To determine the pattern of employees' mobility in HLIs.	What is the trend of employees' mobility in HLIs?	Trend of employee mobility in HLIs	Transferred employees, HROs	Content or thematic analysis/Direct quotes
To explore the push and pull factors for employees' mobility in HLIs.	What are the factors for employees' mobility in HLIs?	Factors for employees' mobility in HLIs.	Transferred employees, HROs, Institutional top management	Content or thematic analysis/Direct quotes
To recommend how HLIs may devise motivation and retention strategies to minimise employee mobility.	How HLIs may devise motivation and retention strategies to minimise employee mobility	Best motivation and retention strategies to minimise employee mobility	Transferred employees, HROs, Institutional top management,	Content or thematic analysis/Direct quotes

3.0 Findings and Discussions

This section presents the study results and discussion. The results and subsequent discussion are in some cases supplemented with information from grey literature that addresses the study problem with regard to HLIs level.

3.1. Demographic Characteristics

The study participants were categorised based on their gender, age group, marital status and level of education, as indicated in Table 2.

Table 2: Summary of demographic data

Gender		Age group			Marital status			Level of education			
Mal	Fema	20-30	31-40	41+	Singl	Marri	Wido	Divorc	Bachel	Mast	Ph
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13	7	0	11	9	1	18	0	1	0	6	14

3.2 Findings based on specific objectives

Pattern of employees' mobility in HLIs

In understanding the push and pull factors, the study aimed to understand the dominant trend of employees' mobility in HLIs. The findings established that very

few move from non-university institutions to universities. The common trend reported by top management in the selected higher learning institutions (e.g., HLI3-TM) shows that most of the academic staff move within the institutions of the same level (i.e. from university to university or university college and/or from non-university to non-university institutions). This may be explained by the fact that Grade Point Average (GPA) requirement (3.8 – Bachelor degree) for academicians in universities and university colleges are higher compared to that required by non-university institutions (3.5 – Bachelor degree). This was clarified by one of the participants as follows:

“People move for the best. Common mobility is within non-university institutions because of qualification differences that prevent a staff to move from a non- university institution to a university. We have a few that have moved in from other academic institutions. However, those who wish to move in are interviewed and a reference check is done to certify their credibility and integrity (HLI1-HR).”

It was further established that some employees were attracted by institutional efforts to have development projects which attract funding and as a result increase in income to those involved in such projects. It was noted that some employees were well skilled to bring in development projects but institutional environments lacked favourable environments. This observation caused some academic staff to move to institutions where they provide support in writing projects as echoed by one interviewee:

“... I stayed there for almost six (6) years now, and to my surprise, the institution has not even a minor project that may enrich the institutional income. This institution has not established a strong base for projects (HLI3-TE).”

The push and pull factors for employees’ mobility in HLIs

The inquiry on the push and pull factors for employees’ mobility in HLIs showed that a transfer or mobility of employees in HLIs is triggered by several factors, and in some cases the transferred employees mentioned more than one push or pull factors. The NVivo 12 Plus word cloud extract from interviews provides a summary of the push and pull factors for employees’ mobility in HLIs as well as retention strategies (Figure 1).



Figure 1: Word cloud showing emerging issues from interviews

One HLI (HLI3) reported having not had movement of academic staff to other HLIs for the previous fifteen years; instead, the institution had received several of them from other institutions. Some of the strategies undertaken to retain academic staff in the institution as presented in the NVivo 12 Plus word cloud extract were having a complaint desk in place, a well-implemented incentive scheme, regular open discussions in meetings and talent management schemes.

Table 3 shows the rating of push and pull factors for employees’ mobility in selected higher learning institutions in Tanzania.

Table 3: Push and pull factors

Factors	Pull	Push
In search of academic growth	✓	-
Joining the family after staying away for a long time	✓	-
Looking for a good pay (apart from structured salaries)	✓	-
Ordinary public service transfer	-	✓
Frustration from workplace politics	-	✓
Victim of workplace restructuring	-	✓
Failure to meet institutional academic requirements	-	✓
Low salaries compared to current institution	-	✓
Health-related factors	-	✓
Categorisation	-	✓

The results of this study on the push and pull factors for academic staff mobility in the selected higher learning institutions in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, showed that most of the employees were transferred to new institutions due to multiple factors including workplace restructuring, institutional politics, failure to meet the required academician's needs and demands, health-related factors, good salary pay, and others. Through the identified research sub-themes, the study has established mixed evidence.

The quest for the transferred employees established that, as academicians, they were not willing to start new life in new academic institutions, but there had no choice since the transfer was triggered by other factors. The major concern among them was losing the chances for career development some of which support funds which came from institutional projects. They described such concerns with regret as echoed by one of the academic staff who said:

“I had already secured an opportunity for a PhD study through one of the institutionally funded projects. But my transfer has made me lose the chance (HLI1-TE2).”

Moreover, family issues came around the discussion whereas some transferred employees admitted that they had to seek transfer on their own to join their families after a long period of staying away. Of this, one had to say emotionally:

“It is not easy staying away and up-keeping two families. Sometimes you fail to work comfortably due to family issues. In one way, most of the time, especially during the week, you need to travel to solve some of these issues ... of course it was really a risk for road accidents (HLI4-TE1).”

According to top management, it was made clear that sometimes they had to do “head hunting”, especially for academic staff whose expertise was highly needed to teach some courses. In such a context, some employees were willing to move from one HLI to another. Nevertheless, the findings have shown that such a decision was possible when the sending institution had a low pay compared to the receiving institution. Thus, issues related to high salary triggered the mobility of some academic staff. A study by Wiboga (2018) established similar findings when he studied the “Employee Mobility in Public Institutions in Tanzania: Lesson from Selected Institutions in Ilala Municipality, Dar es Salaam.”

The Human Resource Officers were of the view that, to a large extent, employees' mobility in HLIs is triggered by work motivation, friendly welfare policies and

good working climate (HLI1-HR; HLI2-HR; and HLI4-HR). It was further reported that the majority of the academic staff prefer fair treatment to all academicians in all spheres of academic life. According to HROs, people become motivated when incentive scheme is in favour of their entire work career, and the opposite is true. This particular finding is also resonated by the Equity theory which proposes that when an employee perceives a state of inequality, he/she may resort to leaving the organization.

The influence of policy change (sometimes a “silence policy”) was mentioned by HLI1-TE2 and HLI3-TE2 as contributing push factor for employees’ mobility in HLIs. It was reported that policy change, supported by political milieu, had an influence in some selected HLIs to transfer employees to other institutions. For example, directives from the ministry accounted for the transfer of some academic staff from one institution to another. In some ways, it can be argued that the blended factors—workplace restructuring and policy change—played a great role for employees’ mobility in HLIs. This finding is similar to one established by a study conducted in Ghana, which registered high workplace restructuring as one of the main causes of academic employees’ mobility (Lee & Teo, 2005). One of the transferred employees affirmed:

“... There were some discussions that some of us have stayed here for a long time and in some ways; we were regarded as stumbling blocks to the execution of some institutional activities. Thus, some of us were victims of that and received letters of transfer...” (HLI2-TE2).

This study further established that in some selected HLIs, working conditions that include brutality of the monarch system had destroyed employees’ working habits (HLI2-TE2). Hence the majority of the interviewed employees (HLI1-TE, HLI2-TE3, HLI3-TE1, and HLI4-TE1 reverberated their voices regarding how the leadership and management were not friendly to their working environments.

Strategies to minimise employee mobility in HLIs

This objective sought the views of HLI top management, HROs and transferred employees on what should be done to reduce the academic staff mobility in Tanzania’s HLIs. On this inquiry, several strategies were mentioned by interviewees. One of them said:

“... There is a need for government to revise the available staff welfare schemes to attract academic staff to stay in their institutions

for a reasonable number of years... It has become common nowadays that you train an academic staff at the PhD level, but because of less motivation, they leave and join other institutions” (HLI3-HRO).

Apart from the need for improving staff welfare scheme, the participants suggested to forge inter-institutional links within and outside the country for writing and implementing various major research-based projects. This suggestion came up as a way of recommending HLIs to forge links and partnerships in research undertaking. One transferred employee emphasised:

“... You know a higher learning institution has three core activities: teaching, research, and consultancy. ... All these are important, and when implemented in collaboration with other institutions within and or from outside the country, you create links and attract major projects that would benefit our academic staff...” (HLI4-TM).

During an interview, participant HLI-TE2 was of the view that institutional needs do vary across institutions, hence the need to encourage internal mobility would reduce the problem as argued:

“... Encouraging employees to plan for their career goals would give them a strong sense of ownership in every day’s work, hence incentivising them to work diligently toward achieving their career dreams would discourage mobility to other institutions. (HLI3-TE2).

Moreover, some participants proposed to have plans in place to retain the best students who can have assurance of staying in the institution for a longer period as contended by HLI2-HRO: “Retaining the best students might minimise the problem”.

4.0 Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the findings on academic staff mobility in higher learning institutions, it can be concluded that pull and push factors in HLIs are mainly influenced by workplace restructuring and policies. While some respondents stated that their movement to other institutions was prompted by family reasons, most of them decried the unfriendly workplace policies and conditions. Furthermore, findings indicated that there was a perception that workplace restructuring was influenced by institutional politics victimising some academic staff. Altogether, these reasons

demotivate academic staff and limit their professional advancement, making them seek HLIs that offer friendly conditions.

Despite the fact that mobility is necessary for professional growth for the academics, it is important to maintain a relevant turnover/mobility ratio for organisational growth and work consistency. Thus, the study findings suggest the need to have different retention strategies ranging from good governance/leadership, friendly HR related policies that are objectively implemented, flexible management that is open for discussion, and views to fair motivational packages.

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