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INFLUENCE OF CONFERENCE ON ACADEMIC STAFF PERFORMANCE AND RETENTION IN FEDERAL UNIVERSITIES IN NORTH-WEST ZONE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT
This study examined the Influence of Conference on Academic Staff Performance and Retention in Federal Universities in North-West Zone, Nigeria. The study was guided by two objectives which include determine the influence of conference on academic staff performance in federal universities in North-West Zone, Nigeria; and to find out the influence of conference on academic staff retention in federal universities in North-West Zone, Nigeria with two corresponding null hypotheses. The study used a descriptive survey research design. The total population of the study comprised of fifteen thousand nine hundred and six (15, 906). The study used multi-stage sampling technique and the sample size of the study was 375 respondents determined using Research Advisors sampling table (2006). Data were collected using adapted questionnaires titled "Capacity Building Programmes Questionnaire (CBPQ), Academic Staff Performance Questionnaire (ASPQ) and Academic Staff Retention Questionnaire (ASRQ). The three instruments were validated by three professionals from both Educational Administration and Planning and Test and Measurement while the reliability of the instruments was 0.78, 0.88 and .89 respectively determined using Cronbach alpha. A simple linear regression was used to testing the null hypotheses at the 0.05 level of significance. Findings of the study revealed that conference had no statistically significant influence on academic staff performance in federal universities in North-West Zone, Nigeria ($\beta = .015$, $R^2 = .000$, $p = .780 > .05$); conference had statistically significant negative influence on academic staff retention in federal universities in North-West Zone, Nigeria ($\beta = -.111$, $R^2 = -.12$, $p = .035 < .05$). The study recommends that university management and other bodies should managed conference participation strategically by complementing conference sponsorship with career development, recognition and improved working conditions so that professional exposure strengthens institutional attachment rather than encouraging staff mobility and promotion sake promotion purposes.

Keywords: Conference, Academic Staff Performance, Retention, Federal Universities.

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Introduction

A conference is a formal gathering of scholars and professionals to discuss and present research findings, share ideas, and engage in intellectual exchange (Onwuegbuzie and Frels, 2016). Academic conferences provide a platform for advancing knowledge, validating research, and fostering academic collaboration. For university academic staff, conferences serve as an essential aspect of scholarly development, offering opportunities for feedback, visibility, networking, and staying current within their fields. Similarly, a conference is a structured scholarly event where researchers and professionals gather to present and discuss academic work, foster collaborations, and promote knowledge exchange. Conferences may be discipline-specific or interdisciplinary and may occur at local, national, or international levels (Freeman, 2017).

Conference is an occasion where individuals meet at a particular place or virtually to present ideas, research results and publications. Their conceptualisation also accommodates related academic events such as workshops, symposia and colloquia (Franken et al., 2022). Henderson and Burford (2020) posited that an academic conference is a planned event that brings together individuals with shared academic or research interests to exchange and disseminate knowledge. This definition emphasises the importance of conferences in promoting scholarly communication and the sharing of research findings. However, recent trends show a gradual shift toward hybrid formats, external sponsorships, and interdisciplinary themes that address sustainable development, education reform, and national security (UNN, 2022).

Moreover, academic conferences play a crucial role in addressing sector-specific challenges in Nigeria, such as inadequate research funding, poor infrastructure, and brain drain. They allow Nigerian scholars to contextualize global research within local realities, and in many cases, conferences become spaces for dialogue on national educational policy, reforms, and academic freedom. Sharing process of sharing research outputs through presentations, publications, or discussions during academic conferences is a core objective of conference participation and a means of influencing practice and policy.

Academic staff job performance is the degree and extent by which lecturers carry out the official tasks and functions in the department or faculty. Academic staff job performance is the total performance of teaching, research and community service responsibilities that an academic staff member has carried out and is still carrying out in the institution where he or she works at a particular time. Ogunode and Ibrahim (2023) viewed academic staff job performance as the general record of tasks carried out by an academic staff member to be compared with the assigned responsibilities and functions given to them. Job performance of university academic staff could be measured through their job commitment, feelings of job challenges, job meaningfulness and job responsibilities.

On the other hand, retention on the other hand is an important aspect of human resource management in universities because academic staff constitutes the intellectual capital responsible for teaching, research, and community service. Nagarathanam, Venkitasamy and Attiah (2018) posited that retention of academic staff is influenced by a variety of institutional, professional, and personal factors. These include opportunities for professional development, job satisfaction, recognition, career advancement, supportive leadership, and favorable working conditions. When academic staff perceive that their institutions invest in their professional growth through training, workshops, conferences, mentorship, and study fellowships, they are more likely to remain committed to their institutions. Professional development initiatives therefore serve as important tools for improving both staff performance and retention. Therefore, academic staff retention

refers to the ability of an institution to maintain their qualified and experienced academic staff over an extended period through favourable employment conditions, attractive remuneration, professional development opportunities, job security, recognition, career advancement and supportive working environments. It reflects the extent to which academic staff remain committed to their institutions rather than voluntarily leaving for alternative employment opportunities.

The study anchored on Human Capital Theory was popularized by Becker (1964). Gary was a Nobel laureate in Economic Science. Gary view education and training as an investment. It views individuals' skills, knowledge, and abilities as economic assets that contribute to productivity and organizational growth. The core assumptions of the theory are Investment in education, training, and development enhances the productivity and value of employees; Organizations that invest in human capital development are more likely to retain high-performing employees and Employees who benefit from capacity development feel more competent, motivated, and committed, which reduces turnover. Furthermore, human capital theory refers to the knowledge, expertise, and skill one accumulates through education and training. The major elements of this theory are; education and training, the theory rest on the assumption that formal education is highly instrumental and even necessary to improve the production capacity of a population. The theory emphasizes the role of education and training in the growth and development of workers by increasing the level of cognitive stock of productive human capability which is a critical input for innovations, research and development activities. The key assumption underlying this theory is that investment in education and training results in increased learning while increased learning leads to high productivity, and high productivity results to increased wages and business earnings.

This study therefore adopts the human capital theory because of its relevance in providing a strong theoretical foundation to examine how capacity building investments can influence staff job performance and retention in universities. Moreover, the study employed the use of the Human Capital Theory in support of the assertion of Becker (1964) who argued that organizations benefit long-term when they invest in employee development Human Capital Theory is suitable for this study as it logically connects institutional investment in academic staff development with enhanced performance, satisfaction, and retention. It supports the hypothesis that well-structured capacity building programmes lead to longer staff tenure and institutional growth. Theory is also relevant to this study because it provides the theoretical lens through which the link between capacity building and academic staff retention can be understood, evaluated, and improved in north-west Nigerian universities.

Nwosu and Ofoegbu (2019) conducted a study titled "In-service Training and Lecturers' Job Effectiveness in Universities in Anambra State, Nigeria", which utilised a correlational survey design. Data were analyzed using mean, Pearson r, and regression analysis. The findings revealed a significant positive relationship between in-service training activities such as conferences and workshops and lecturers' instructional delivery, research productivity, and community service. The study concluded that in-service training is a critical predictor of lecturer job effectiveness in universities. Mustapha and Gbonegun (2021) carried out a study titled "Training and Development and Lecturers' Productivity in Federal Universities in North-Central, Nigeria" using a descriptive survey design. The findings revealed a significant positive relationship between conference attendance, workshop participation, and in-house training with lecturers' research and teaching productivity. The study concluded that training and development are key drivers of lecturer productivity in federal universities.

In addition, Gabadeen, Joseph and Sadiku, (2025) investigated the influence of academic conference attendance on education innovation output in public universities in North Central, Nigeria based on the perceptions of academic staff. The result of the study showed that academic conference attendance had significant influence on education innovation output in teaching and research activities as perceived by academic staff of conventional and specialized public universities in North Central, Nigeria. The findings also revealed that there is no significant difference between the perception of academic staff of conventional and specialized public universities on the influence of academic conference attendance on innovation output in teaching and research activities in North Central, Nigeria. Similarly, Selesho and Naile (2014) conducted a study on Academic Staff Retention as a Human Resource Factor: University Perspective. The study employed survey research methods with academic staff from South African universities. The findings revealed that job satisfaction emerged as the main factor keeping academic staff in their profession, with professional development opportunities and career advancement prospects being significant contributors to satisfaction. The study concluded that understanding the factors that influence retention, particularly job satisfaction derived from professional growth opportunities, is essential for developing effective retention strategies. Oyalabu, Abolaji and Okon (2023) conducted a study on human capital development and academic staff retention in private universities in South-West, Nigeria. The study found out that human capital development programmes significantly influenced academic staff retention.

Statement of the problem

The effectiveness of universities largely depends on the performance, motivation and retention of their staff. It was discovered that poor mentoring and limited capacity building weaken academic staff satisfaction contribute to the decision to leave universities, which negatively affects performance and retention (Selesho and Naile, 2014). However, capacity building initiatives have been implemented in federal universities to address the issue of low staff job motivation, which affects their job performance and retention. It has been observed by the researcher that there are still issues concerning low performance and retention among universities staff which could be linked to inadequate and unequal opportunities for the staff to participate in trainings, limited professional growth, poor motivation and conferences, among others.

Objectives of the study

The following objectives were formulated to guide the study:

i. Examine the influence of conference on academic staff performance in federal universities in North-West Zone, Nigeria.
ii. Find out the influence of conference on academic staff retention in federal universities in North-West Zone, Nigeria.

Research hypotheses

$H0_1$. There is no significant influence of conference on academic staff performance in federal universities in North-West Zone, Nigeria.

$H0_2$. There is no significant influence of conference on academic staff retention in federal universities in North-West Zone, Nigeria.

Methodology

The study used descriptive survey research design. The total population of the study comprised of fifteen thousand nine hundred and six (15,906) academic staff. The study used a multi-stage sampling technique The universities were stratified into three clusters based on their establishment history and institutional characteristics; Cluster A: Older Conventional Federal

Universities; they include Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria; Bayero University, Kano; Nigeria Defense Academy and Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto. Cluster B: New Conventional Federal Universities; they include Federal University Dutsin-ma, Federal University, Dutse, Federal University, Gusau, Nigeria Police Academy College, Wudil and Federal University, Birnin Kebbi and Cluster C: Specialized Federal Universities; they include Federal University of Agriculture, Zuru, Federal University of Technology Babura, Federal University of Transportation, Daura, Federal University of Education, Kano, Federal University of Health Sciences Funtua, Federal of Science and Technology, Kabo, Federal University of Applied Sciences, Kachia and Federal University of Education, Zaria From each cluster, two universities were selected using simple random sampling technique. From Cluster A: (Older Conventional Federal Universities), two universities were randomly selected: Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria and Bayero University, Kano. From Cluster B (New Conventional Federal Universities), two universities were randomly selected: Federal University Dutsin-ma and Federal University Gusau. From Cluster C (Specialized Federal Universities), two universities were randomly selected: Federal University of Technology Babura and Federal University of Education, Zaria. The sample size of the study was 375 respondents, determined using the Research Advisors sampling table (2006). Data were collected using adapted questionnaires titled "Capacity Building Programmes Questionnaire (CBPQ), Academic Staff Performance Questionnaire (ASPQ) and Academic Staff Retention Questionnaire (ASRQ). The instruments were validated by three professionals from both Educational Administration and Planning and Test and Measurement while the reliability of the three instruments was 0.78, 0.88 and .89 respectively determined using Cronbach's alpha. A Simple linear regression was used in testing the null hypotheses at the 0.05 level of significance.

Results and discussion

The analysis was based on the Three Hundred and Fifty Nine respondents (359) who correctly filled and returned their questionnaires.

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant influence of conference on academic staff performance in federal universities in North-West Zone, Nigeria.

Table 1: Simple Linear Regression Showing Influence of Conference on Academic Staff Performance

Variable	B	T	Sig.	R^2	F	P-value	Df.	N
Conference	.015	.279	.780	.000	.078	.780[b]	1 357	359
Academic Staff Performance							358	

Table 1 shows the linear regression of the influence of conference on academic staff performance indicating a very weak positive relationship between conference participation and academic staff performance. The R^2 = .000 indicates that conference participation explained approximately 0.0% of the variation in academic performance (F = .078, t = .279, β = .015, p = .780 > .05). The regression model is therefore not statistically significant, so conference participation does not significantly predict academic staff performance. Hence, the null hypothesis is retained, indicating that conference participation does not significantly influence academic staff performance in federal universities in North-West Zone, Nigeria.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant influence of conference on academic staff retention in federal universities in North-West Zone, Nigeria.

Table 2: Simple Linear Regression Showing Influence of Conference on Academic Staff Retention

Variable	B	T	Sig.	R^2	F	P-value	Df.	N
Conference							1	
	-.111	22.985	.035	0.12	4.456	.035[b]	357	359
Academic Staff Retention							358	

Table 2 shows the linear regression of the influence of conference on academic staff retention indicating a weak negative relationship between conference and academic staff retention. The $R^2 = .012$ indicates that conference explained approximately 1.2% of the variance in academic staff retention, while the remaining 98.8% of the variance may be attributed to other factors not included model ($F = 4.456$, $t = -2.111$, $\beta = -.111$, $p = .035 < .05$). The regression model is therefore statistically significant. This indicates that conference participation significantly predicts academic staff retention. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected. This implies that conference participation significantly influences academic staff retention, although the direction of the observed relationship is negative. That is, for every one standard deviation increase in conference participation, academic staff retention decreases by 0.111 standard deviation.

Discussion of the findings

This study examined the influence of conference on academic staff performance and retention in federal universities in North-West Nigeria. Findings of the study show that conference had no statistically significant influence on academic staff performance in federal universities in North-West Zone, Nigeria ($\beta = .015$, $R^2 = .000$, $p = .780 > .05$). The finding contrasts with the findings of Mustapha and Gbonegun (2021), who found a significant positive relationship between conference attendance and lecturers' research and teaching productivity in federal universities in North-Central Nigeria. It also differs from Gabadeen, Joseph and Sadiku (2025), who found that academic conference attendance significantly, influenced educational innovation output in teaching and research activities in public universities in North-Central Nigeria. The current finding is inconsisted with the finding of Nwosu and Ofoegbu (2019), who reported a significant positive relationship between in-service training activities such as conferences and workshops and lecturers' instructional delivery, research productivity, and community service. Nevertheless, the current finding agrees with the Human Capital Theory in recognizing that professional exposure can potentially enhance human capital, but it suggests that exposure alone may not automatically translate into improved job performance. It is therefore possible that conference attendance has limited impact where academic staff attend primarily for certification, promotion or networking, although this was not measured in this study.

The study findings revealed that conference had a statistically significant negative influence on academic staff retention in federal universities in North-West Zone, Nigeria ($\beta = -.111$, $R^2 = .012$, $p = .035 < .05$). This finding contradicts with the expectation of Human Capital Theory and the findings of studies such as Selesho and Naile (2014), which associated professional development opportunities with staff satisfaction and retention; the finding also disagreed with the finding of Oyalabu, Abolaji and Okon (2023), who found that human capital development programmes significantly influenced academic staff retention. Therefore, the

researcher asserts that, conference participation may improve the external mobility of academic staff without necessarily strengthening their attachment to their institution; however, this explanation was not tested in this study.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, it was concluded that conference had no statistically significant influence on academic staff performance; however, conference had a statistically significant negative influence on academic staff retention.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusion of the study, the following recommendations are made:

1. University managements and other bodies should managed conference participation strategically by complementing conference sponsorship with career development, recognition and improved working conditions.
2. Academic staff should be encouraged by the university management to consider conference as professional exposure that strengthens institutional attachment rather than encouraging staff mobility and promotion sake.

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