

## Teacher Retention and Attrition: A Review of the Literature

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### Abstract

*The teaching profession and the essential roles teachers play in building the human capital base of any nation cannot be underestimated. These essential roles are central to basic education, most especially in developing nations. There may however seem to be close substitutes for the roles of education managers in the areas of education delivering apparatus with programmed instructions. Apparently, in emerging economies such as Nigeria, teachers no doubt are still the key managers of knowledge. The main engine of economic growth in any country is through a well-trained and knowledge driven education workforce. Due to the persistent labour turnover in schools and high job dissatisfaction among teachers in Nigeria and other parts of the world, this study seeks to find out those factors that encourage teachers' attrition. The study adopts an extensive review of literature such as conference papers, journal articles, internet sources, books, newspapers to find out the factors that determine teachers' attrition and retention in schools particularly in Nigeria. The study concludes that for teachers to be retained in schools, certain management issues as they affect teacher education, must be thoroughly evaluated. The study further recommends that educational managers should be made to go through staff training and development programmes and curricula enhancement. This is necessary and important for teachers to be well equipped for the task ahead, provide adequate remuneration, welfare packages, proper work environment amongst others as may be obtainable in other professions.*

**Keywords:** Teacher Retention, Retention Management, Attrition of Teachers, Educational Institutions, Nigeria, Labour turnover.

### 1. Introduction

Organizations in different industries seem to have a challenge in recruiting and retaining the right talents probably as a result of economic downturns or through voluntary turnover (Dolton and Van der Klaauw, 1999; Goswami and Jha, 2012). Results from previous studies in this area of investigation revealed that loss of knowledgeable personnel could lead to poor performance of organisations and this would impact outcomes of such firms (Ayeni, 2005; AEE 2008; Goldhaber et al., 2007; Long et al., 2012b). Employee turnover can be perceived in different ways depending on the context. In schools and amongst teachers, employee turnover is the rate of departure among staffs engaged in a school for a given period. If it is one or two teachers leaving for different reasons at the end of a session, the impact will not be as much as excessive turnover, which can be costly and detrimental to instructional cohesion in schools (NCTAF 2003; Clotfelter et al., 2004). In order to prevent the loss of large amount of staffs, policies in western nations such as the United Kingdom and United States of America have been put in place. Every teacher that leaves the teaching profession drastically cuts into the school budget and is a factor in whether or not students attain high performance in their studies. The National Academy of Education published an Education Policy White Paper concerning teacher quality that stated if students from low socioeconomic backgrounds received instruction from highly effective teachers in elementary schools for three consecutive years, they could pass standardized assessments at the middle school level (Eton, 1984; Baike, 2002; AEE 2008). Unfortunately, evidence also indicates that all students regardless of their background are "harmed academically" by poor teaching for three years running. Effective teachers who are committed and willing to teach to a diverse student population are essential to the success of a school and can make a difference in the lives of each student.

McKee (2003) argues that personnel turnover is a phenomenon that can be viewed from an array of dimensions, depending on the subject of discussion. However, considering job turnover in schools, it can be viewed as the degree of

departure among personnel that are employed to work for the schools in a particular period. The authors find that the job turnover problem involve a very challenging task to the employee involved and the government despite the angle it is looked at. To the employee, it means some definite loss of income that could have accumulated should the person not quit the job in question. These issues are consequential in the Nigerian perspective because losing one's job would result to other adverse external problems due to the fact that the person may not be able to cater for himself and the extended family (Clotfelter et al., 2008; Allensworth et al., 2009). Studies reports that personnel turnover is even a greater problem to the government of the day apart from the earlier reported problems that would be encountered by the individual involved (Achor et al., 2009; Long et al., 2012a; Goswami and Jha, 2012). In view of the above, it is pertinent to note that job turnover issues is counter-productive to the attainment of schools' goals and government objective of providing jobs for the citizenry. Due to the persistent labour turnover in schools and high job dissatisfaction among teachers in Nigeria and other parts of the world, this study seeks to find out those factors that encourage teachers' attrition. This study is arranged in the following manner. The next section contains review of relevant studies such as retention of teachers in schools, teacher retention management, attrition of teachers, causes of teacher attrition, factors that help in retaining teachers, impact of attrition. After this the methodology used for the study was presented and reasons clearly stated. Finally the study concludes with implications and suggestions to policy makers and future researchers.

## **2. Review of Related Studies**

### *2.1 Retention of Teachers in Schools*

Boyd et al. (2006) opines that employees play vital roles in any organization. Ultimately employees contribute immensely to the performance and success of the organization and are the most valuable resource that any organization can rely on. Whether in the developing or developed countries, the challenge for most organizations is how best to retain their employees for the long term in the organization (Goswami and Jha, 2012; Long et al., 2012a, b). This loss of employees has been seen as a consequence in the performance of firms which have a long term impact on the companies. Hirsch and Emerick (2006) argues that employee retention is a process in which the employees are encouraged to remain with the organization for a maximum period of time or for the completion of a particular project. However, there are policies and practices organizations may use to retain or stop their talent from leaving the company. Ingersoll (2003) reports that about 15.7% of teachers quit their jobs annually in the United States of America (USA). In addition to this, the author mentioned that the national teacher turnover rate is about 16.8% and 40% of those that quit do not return to the profession. Henke et al. (2001) found that the high turnover rate of teachers in the USA costs the education system about \$7billion annually. However, the situation is not so different in Nigeria, where the turnover rate is suggested to be above 10% and in Ghana, teacher attrition and retention in the education sector has become a matter of great concern. The high rate of teacher attrition impacts negatively on schools improvement efforts as it disrupts the stability and continuity of teaching.

Some studies revealed that most school teachers are not worried to leave their profession in as much that their meagre remuneration are paid on time, promotion made as at when due, and basic welfare packages provided (Eton, 1984; Kazeem, 1999; Chianson, 2008). Another study that recognizes disbursement of remunerations, allowances and staff elevation as the main variables that determine the attitudes of teachers to their job is that of Eton (1984). However, Amadi (1983) argues that irregular payment of the remuneration of teachers is among the most critical challenge of the occupation in Nigeria. Mbanefoh (1982) contributes that active teachers are often worried about the delay in remuneration and non-disbursement of other extras rather than other non-monetary inducements. In some research outcome, it is revealed that principals of schools usually complain about the unwilling attitudes of teachers to display maximum commitment to their jobs (Ayeni, 2005; NSB 2008; Boyd et al., 2006). This attitude may be as a result of delay in payment of teacher's salary. Moreover, it is a known fact that the prompt payment of teachers' salaries in Nigeria enhances more attention to work. In his opinion, Ingersoll (2001) posits that financial reward in some cases has not necessarily changed teacher's low esteem and their output. He suggests that even though adequate remuneration and prompt disbursement of rewards are important encouraging variables, there is evidence that some other variables can weaken obligation to work. These variables according to Taylor and Heywood (2008) includes Herzberg's hygiene factors such as working conditions, job security, company policy, relations with colleagues and supervisors. These are different from such motivator factors or satisfiers like achievement, independence, recognition, responsibility, challenge and creativity.

## 2.2 *Teacher Retention Management*

Elfers et al. (2006) opines that managing teacher retention emphasizes on the strategies that result to employee retention that thoroughly inspire such cohesion, productivity and level of staff commitment to duty. Easley (2006) describes five philosophies of retention management that could enhance personnel satisfaction, commitment and output. According to him, staff require to feel they are valued and trusted. Employers should also understand that when they partake in the growth and development plans of their employees. This may encourage such employees to remain in the organization because such could be interpreted to mean that the organization cares about employee welfare (Bamisaye, 1998; Baike, 2002; Long et al., 2012a). Majority of employees desire to stay longer on the job and to feel more knowledgeable and more answerable, at any stage on the job. Abakpa and Agbo-Egwu (2008) highlights that a serious organization would motivate its staffs constantly emphasizing on performance and results. The employer supports the staff in areas of their competence, other skills they deserve to acquire and avenues to acquire such skills. In view of this, the employees obtain more knowledge as the move up the ladder on the job and take up more accountability and responsibility (Azuka, 2003; Anderson and Olson, 2005). The authors concludes that attitude also inspires innovation and creativity among organizational personnel.

## 2.3 *Attrition of Teachers*

Attrition is the steady decrease in membership of an organization by way of retirement, resignation or death (Elfers et al., 2006; Goswani and Jah, 2012). In other words, attrition could be the number of employees quitting their jobs which includes both voluntary and involuntary separation. The problem of attrition is insurmountable whether in the education sector or any other profession, some attrition is inevitable. This is because, some teachers will retire, some others will quit for reasons that is personal, and some others will be dismissed from their jobs whilst some others are encouraged to leave the profession. Henke et al. (2001) found that about 50 percent of those engaged as classroom instructors quit within a five years period, and the best and brightest teachers are often the first to leave. This happening has prompted the concern of why teachers leave their jobs within few years of entering the profession. McKee (2003) argues that teacher attrition is an important challenge that cannot be underestimated because it results in reduction of personnel in schools. This is more evident in the fact that almost half of all new teachers quit the job in less than five years of starting. This creates a difficult situation where more teachers quit compared to those coming into the profession. However, some of the challenges of teacher attrition may be linked to career progression of the people involved (Barmby, 2006; Borman and Dewling, 2008). In this case, attrition could not be said to be bad. Nevertheless, majority of the reasons that result to teacher attrition is viewed from variables such as poor remuneration, lack of management encouragement, not too conducive work atmosphere, issues connected to students, and collegiality with peers. There is need to understand thoroughly the factors that contribute to teacher attrition so as to be able to provide a conducive work environment for them.

Empirical literature has identified many causes of teacher attrition in recent years. Guarino et al. (2006) stresses that some of the studies revealed that the problem is due to standard of human capital accumulated by teachers. Some evidence show that teachers who acquire higher certificates obtained in more lucrative courses and in prime universities and colleges would most likely not stay too long in the teaching profession. But, for degrees that are not of high market value, the probability of such teachers staying is higher. Another group of researchers show that attrition can be sub-categorized into many kinds, each affected variously by human and social capital (Azuka, 2003; Long et al., 2012a). Some educators quit fulltime classroom teaching either for professions in an unconnected areas if they quit the teaching profession entirely.

Ingersoll (2003) opines that other individuals can remain working in the profession but move to other schools. Another view suggests that some may temporarily quit teaching profession perhaps to have children, and then come back to their job afterwards. Anderson and Olsen (2005) found that retirement is naturally perceived among the primary reasons for teacher attrition. However, the amount of teachers quitting through this channel show that it may not be a course for concern. For example, Ingersoll (2003) investigates teacher turnover and cites that retirement of teachers is not an essentially domineering reasons for attrition than job dissatisfaction or to leaving to follow another career. Hence, the literature indicates that a substantial amount of teachers resign their current job since there does not seem to be hope for change. Moreover, Job satisfaction or dissatisfaction is always mentioned and emphasized as essential on studies relating to teacher attrition and retention (Stockard and Lehman, 2004; Ingersoll, 2003; Long et al., 2012b). In order to find out the common problems identified for teacher turnover and retention rate among beginning teachers, Stockard and Lehman (2004) found the following as the reasons and causes; dissatisfaction of workers with current job, unsatisfactory

conditions of work and inadequate remuneration, not enough support from family members, management challenges, colleagues and the public, discipline, challenges of attendance, rising size of classes, inadequate encouragement of students and inadequate opportunities for teachers to partake in important decisions that affects their schools.

## 2.4 Causes of Teacher Attrition

Boyd et al. (2007) posits that many factors can contribute to teacher attrition and retention. The researchers mentions further that among reasons that determines whether a teacher will remain on his job or quit the profession depend on individual factors, but these may vary from one country to another. Bobbitt et al. (1994) posits that not minding these, there are factors that are peculiar to different areas and countries, the main cause of teacher intention to leave is the low salaries and unsatisfactory working conditions. Reports in sub-Saharan Africa suggests that attrition and turnover is associated with the HIV and AIDS epidemic and also due to such reasons as lack of adequate salaries, allowances, housing and promotion (Dinham, 1994; Boyd et al., 2007). Attrition and retention of classroom educational managers is a complicated issues, with reasons to remain or leave usually linked to personal variables, still, some themes and patterns may be connected (Boyd et al., 2006). A variety of constructs can be related to the challenges of teacher attrition, nonetheless, the variables may vary from one country to the other. The dimensions in USA may not be the same in Malaysia or in Nigeria, but not withstanding the differences in these variables that are common to all countries as reported in past studies include the following:

**Inadequate Salary:** Recent happenings has shown that economic satisfaction plays important roles in the life of classroom teachers. Financial remuneration cannot be underrated as it plays a role in taking care of the family and the staff in question. Hanushek et al. (2005) argues that salary is a source of remuneration that is perceived as very crucial to working people, adequate reward can define ones willingness to stay on a profession, while poor remuneration could be a factor that encourages a worker to quit his current career. Boyd et al. (2007) investigates the impact of variation in pay and intention of teachers to leave. The outcome of their research revealed that teaching profession generally does not provide enough financial rewards to lower teacher attrition problems. In this situation, it cannot be denied that monetary rewards is indeed among the factors that could be useful in stemming the tide of teacher attrition in schools. Hanushek et al. (2004) reports that teachers in Bangladesh are highly under-remunerated compared to their peers in other profession, the monthly pay of teachers in the country is meagre and makes it more daunting to attract people into the profession. In Tanzania, Davidson (2000) found that teachers are not satisfied with their monthly pay. Achor et al. (2009) sampled twenty secondary school teachers in Ghana through interviews and reported that teacher salaries and welfare of teachers are not often disbursed as at when due by the government and some of the teachers have taken to petty trading to augment their daily leaving. Abakpa and Agbo-Egwu (2008) surveyed some secondary school teachers in Nigeria and reported that about 62.94% took up menial jobs as strategy to adjust to economic situations since they could not cope with their required daily expenditures if they had to rely on government pay alone.

**Poor Working Conditions:** Another important variable that results in teacher attrition is the unenviable work environment in most schools. If a working atmosphere is not conducive for teachers, not minding the staff level of commitment, there is no how such persons can efficiently carry out their duties as required. Working conditions was classified by NCTAF (2003) into both professional work atmosphere and demographic characteristics of the school. They view it to include professional teaching circumstances which play an important part in judgements to quit teaching at a particular education institution, and that it contributes to judgements to quit. Buckley et al. (2005) argues that large class sizes were the most indicated factor that made some teachers quit their jobs in some schools particularly in low socioeconomic communities with inadequate facilities. Johnson et al. (2005) found that the significance of working in safe structures and properly furnished educational institutions cannot be underestimated. They added that those teachers who work in low income settings frequently lack enough facilities to do their work as expected. Ayeni (2005) reports that in majority of public schools in Nigeria, there are insufficient teaching facilities such as; Textbooks, Maps, world globes, laboratory apparatuses and other tools for instructors and learners to work and study with. Bamisaye (1998) finds that many teachers discharge their duties in conditions that are unsatisfactory, this they author reports has potential to reduce self-esteem and is generally de-motivating for the personnel involved. Educational institutions in many developing countries do not possess the requisite standard of infrastructures such as pipe-borne water, electricity, staff rooms, toilets and so on. These environmental factors can also lead to distress at work (see Oke and Dawson, 2012). However, Amadi (1983) contributes that most secondary schools students in Nigeria study in an uncondusive study environment, the basic tools are deficient and this scenario has contributed in no small measure in lowering the morale of teachers.

**Leadership style:** Principals with bad leadership styles may force their employees to quit. This can result to dissatisfaction of teachers and lead to attrition (Baikie, 2002). Disrespect from school administrators is most often cited as

reasons for teacher attrition. Boyd et al. (2007) investigates the involvement of teachers in schools policy decisions and found that in New York, working conditions, particularly management encouragement is a critical factor to retain teachers. Azuka (2003) opines that teachers in Nigerian schools who are not encouraged by their school principals signified their interest to quit teaching career entirely should they have a better career prospect elsewhere.

**Posting to Rural Communities:** Teachers posted to local communities encounter difficulties in coping with such environment. In addition, schools located in rural areas find it difficult to retain their personnel. This is because teachers in such areas feel isolated and alienated and hence there is a high tendency to quit either entirely or go to another school situated in an urban community (Harris et al., 2006; Chianson, 2008). However, getting young teachers to work in rural communities is the most daunting task due to social isolation.

## 2.5 Factors that help in retaining teachers

In order to stem the tide in the high rate of teacher attrition and intention to leave their job, there is need to adopt certain strategies by policy and educational services managers. This suggestion is not restricted to the developing countries alone but also to developed countries and regions.

**Remuneration of Teachers:** The remuneration of teachers has constantly been mentioned as a key variable of teacher retention by several researchers globally. Data available publicly from government sources was used to assess the relevance of salary as it affects teachers' intention to remain in the teaching profession. Goldhaber et al. (2007) found that increased remuneration enhance both teachers quality and retention rate. DeAngelis and Presley (2007) adds that pay has great impact on teachers and can also be a yardstick to choose whether to stay. Glableck and Bax (2004) found that respondents sampled in USA agreed that they will remain on their teaching jobs if salary is raised.

**Style of Leaders:** Loeb et al. (2005) examines the impact of schools administration leadership styles on intention of teachers to remain. However, the concept of leadership do not have a universally agreed description because the meaning could frequently be pretentious by what it anticipates to cover. Long et al. (2012a) describes leadership as getting individuals to carry out tasks that have been assigned to them in a more effective and efficient manner. Knapp et al. (2006) opines school heads that are prosperous on their job turned out to be those who possess varied professional experience and had placed personnel involvement as key in running affairs of their schools. Johnson et al. (2005) reports that school administrators play an important role in adopting forward thinking initiatives, building joint mission or making on-going decisions about curriculum and instructions that foster retention of classroom teachers.

## 2.6 Impact of Attrition

Long et al. (2012a) opines that turnover of staffs has an enduring impact on the productivity of organisations. The authors mentioned further that when they quit, there would be an urgent need for replacement which results to the organization incurring certain amount of tangible expenditure (Azuka, 2003; Baike, 2002; Achor et al., 2009; Long et al., 2012b). However, such effects could range from expenses that would be incurred to replace such employee and the problem of managing culture shock of the new employees.

**Direct impact:** Authors found that increased labour turnover means some degree of failure on the organisation's ability to establish proper human relations priorities (Anderson and Olson, 2005; Long et al., 2012b). Organisation customers and businesses are negatively affected and the organization's internal strengths and weaknesses are exposed. Newly recruited personnel require to be continually added, additional expenditure in training, enlightening them on how to align with the culture of the organization and so on.

**Indirect impact:** Barmby (2006) stresses that rising turnover could result to lingering or complete cycle. Also attrition definitely leads to reduced productivity, employees quit their jobs causing other staffs to work harder and this increases attrition. Azuka (2003) posits that this has a substantial effects on an organisation's strength in coordinating their operations in a competitive atmosphere.

## 3. Methodology

The study adopts an extensive review of literature such as conference papers, journal articles, internet sources, books, newspapers to find out the factors that determine teachers' attrition and retention in schools particularly in Nigeria. This particular approach was chosen in order to expose the factors that determine teacher's attrition and retention in Nigeria and make suggestions to future researchers who may decide to adopt an empirical method to investigate the variables identified in this study.

#### 4. Conclusion

From the literature review of existing studies relating to teacher retention and teacher attrition from different countries. This study which aimed to understand why there is high job turnover in the teaching profession across countries has found that certain factors are responsible for this labor mobility. The study also reported the important factors that resulted to teachers wanting to quit or rather teacher's quitting the profession. The most important is financial reward for teachers is inadequate. Mostly in developing countries such as Nigeria, teachers are not paid a living wage. Apart from this, teachers are often owed salaries, meaning that their meagre salary does not come as at when due, for example from the government. Findings from previous studies have shown that those who pick up teaching as a profession are not expecting to be so rich. Their main intention is that the little that is due to them should be paid on time. The leadership style of school principals was also reported to be among the factors that determine intention of teachers to leave their job. In schools where principals do not encourage their personnel, there is high tendency of teachers to want to change to other schools. They may also move to another high paying school or to another high paying organization not in the education sector. Moreover, the working condition in schools is another essential factor that make teachers to quit. Schools where the condition of the environment is not suitable may witness a high turnover rate among their teachers. Particularly in most public schools in Nigeria, the work and learning condition is not very conducive because government do not often pay much attention to equipping these schools. Also it was found that the high rate of job mobility is common among three groups of teachers. One of the groups is the old teachers who are retiring from their jobs, another is the young teachers and the third is the novice or rather inexperienced teachers. However, considering the first group which is the retiring teachers, there is nothing really that can be done about this, as anyone who has served the mandatory active years in service is bound to quit for a restful life at home. But for the other groups, there is need for public office holders in the educational sector to adopt appropriate strategies geared towards making the teaching profession attractive and to be seen as a noble and financially rewarding profession. Financially rewarding is important here because the key reason for anyone picking up an appointment is to be able to fend for his family. Apart from the financial aspect, other salient programs should also be implemented such as trying to restore dignity in the schools by providing quality training and development programs for teachers to upgrade their skills, provide suitable and conducive work environment for teachers, ensure standards are maintained in schools, discipline are instilled among staffs and students. Ensure that the class sizes are minimal and based on the UN recommendations and the capacity of education system to promote rapid and directed social and economic change should be the main agenda of policy makers. This study suggests to future researchers who may decide to adopt an empirical method to investigate the variables identified in this study.

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