# Pragmatic Measures to Obviate Staff Retention Challenges: A Case Study of Perceptions of Selected Human Resources Personnel in Zimbabwe's Public and Private Universities

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## Abstract

*This exploration critiqued out pragmatic measures to obviate staff retention challenges faced by purposely sampled Zimbabwe's two public and two private universities from the Human Resources Personnel perceptions. Two private universities and one public university's Human Resources personnel were selected by means of stakeholder sampling. Data were generated using open-ended interviews. Data were analysed using NVivo software. The study found out pragmatic measures to obviate staff retention challenges faced by Zimbabwe's public and private universities called for the need for a concerted approach by all stakeholders in the overall development of the universities if staff retention challenges were to be curtailed. The study's major conclusion was that engagement of diverse strategic partners is one of the routes to effective staff retention in public and private universities. The study recommends that Government needs to be involved in the funding operations of private universities in the similar manner it does to private schools by paying lecturers' salaries and giving grants and scholarships because it is the government's duty to educate its citizens. Further studies in staff retention strategies in universities need to be conducted on a wider scale to establish how universities in the country are managing the retention of their academic staff.*

**Keywords:** Pragmatic Measures to Obviate Staff Retention Measures, Human Resources Personnel, Staff Retention Challenges,

## Background to the Study

This paper is a fifth excerpt from the researcher's thesis (in press) entitled, 'A Comparative Case Study of Zimbabwe's Public and Private Universities' Staff Retention Strategies' submitted for examination to the Zimbabwe Open University late in 2014.Human Resources practitioners are often faced with a daunting task of retaining their key staff members. Retaining key staff members is one of the major tasks of progressive organisations (Pitts, Marvel and Fernandez, 2011). From the South African experience, Van Dyk, Coetzee and Tevele (2013:61) cite scholars (for example, Mohlala, Goldman and Goosen, 2012; Muteswa and Ortlepp, 2011; Van Dyk, 2012), concurring that for the contemporary South African organisation in the medical and information technology (IT) industry, the retention of service staff with scarce and critical skills has become top priority. In America, Scott (2012:11-12) suggests "bonuses, competitive compensation plan, communication and counter offers as some of the measures to mitigate staff retention challenges in Chicago." In another North Carolina study, Dreyer-Hadley (2008) identified training opportunities and learning for professional development, performance appraisal and professional

development and effective supervision as other measures to mitigate staff retention challenges. In the United Kingdom, Higgins (2012) observes that if the universities are going to compete with other international universities and private organisations they have to work even harder and retain talent. Four Australian scholars namely, Blass (2013), Cocklin (2013), Pechner (2013) and Seehra (2013) presented relevant papers focussing on possible measures to obviate staff retention challenges in their organisations at an international conference; Recruitment and Retention of International Academic Talent at L'Aqua, Cocke Bay, Sydney in Australia from the 27th August 2013 to the 28th August 2013. These Australian scholars concurred that universities needed to play a big part in ensuring staff retention of their talented hard-to-replace personnel. In a bid to retain Returnee Lecturers in Zambia, Mutume (2003) proposed two measures.  First, Mutume (2003) indicated that various tax proposals have been put forward as governments realise that large numbers of citizens living outside their borders are a potential economic resource. For Mutume, another strategy is the adoption of international agreement by industrialised and developing nations under which wealthy countries pledge not to recruit skilled people from developing states. By implication, such an agreement would mean that developing countries would benefit by retaining their skilled staff, although they have to work very hard to keep the staff motivated and satisfied. After at least a decade of brain drain in Zimbabwe, public and private universities were not exempted from exceptional skills shortage. The unsustainable brain drain which Mhlanga, Matope, Mugwagwa, Phuthi and Moyo (2013) refer to as economic melt-down in Zimbabwe reached a climax in 2008 with an inflation level of 231 million %. Mhlanga et al. (2013:118)  observe that, "After the economic meltdown, Zimbabwe is in the process of rebuilding the quality of staff and the staffing levels in its higher education institutions." In another  Zimbabwean study on evaluating the impact of inadequate teaching and learning resources in public  higher education institutions, Mapolisa and Tshabalala (2013:744) the following four recommendations reflective of measures to curb staff turnover in the studied institutions:

- The Government should continue to strive hard to mobilise more financial and material resources for its universities in order to provide adequate learning facilities and materials.
- The private sector-higher education partnerships should be built so as to supplement the resources that the government provides to its higher education institutions.
- The Government should also initiate a process of networking and collaboration between local universities and international organisations so as to help local universities obtain financial and material resources from international institutions.
- There is also need to improve remuneration and working conditions for lecturers so as to motivate them to maintain the high standards of academic achievement that Zimbabwe is well known the world over for.

The preceding findings have succeeded in singling out some of the key measures to obviate staff retention challenges in university and non-university organisations. Some of these findings are based on the perceptions of lecturers, managers and other non-academic staff rather than the Human Resources personnel on one hand. On the other hand, some of the participants in the studies alluded to belonged to non-university organisations. It is on the basis of such gaps that this exploration critiques possible pragmatic measures to obviate staff retention challenges in selected Zimbabwe's public and private universities from the viewpoints of the Human Resources personnel.

## Statement of the Study
Crafting and implementing pragmatic measures to obviate staff retention challenges is far from being a preserve of one unit in an organisation (Curran, 2012; Kwenin, Muathe and Nzulwa, 2013). Many an investigation have explored measures to address staff turnover in different organisations (Boyne, John, James and Petrovsky, 2011; Pitts et al., 2011; Van Dyk, Coetzee and Tebele, 2013), but they were devoid of the voice of the Human Resources personnel regarding how staff retention challenges could be obviated in their organisations. In realising the lack of this group of research participants' perceptions, this exploration hones on critiquing pragmatic measures to obviate staff retention challenges in selected Zimbabwe's public and private universities on the basis of the perceptions of the Human Resources personnel.

## Purpose of the Study
The exploration's main aim is to unmask possible pragmatic measures to obviate staff retention challenges in selected Zimbabwe's public and private universities on the basis of the perceptions of the Human Resources personnel.

## Objectives of the Study

The exploration has a double objective. It intends to:

- Critique pragmatic measures to obviate staff retention challenges in selected Zimbabwe's public and private universities on the basis of the perceptions of the Human Resources personnel.
- Recommend pragmatic measures to obviate staff retention challenges in selected Zimbabwe's public and private universities on the basis of the perceptions of the Human Resources personnel.

## Research Questions

The exploration has two research questions.

- How similar are pragmatic measures to obviate staff retention challenges in selected Zimbabwe's public and private universities on the basis of the perceptions of the Human Resources personnel?
- How different are pragmatic measures to obviate staff retention challenges in selected Zimbabwe's public and private universities on the basis of the perceptions of the Human Resources personnel?

## Rationale for the Study

The conduct of this study is crucial in two ways. First, staff retention strategies are there in Zimbabwe's public and private universities whose visions are to become the best employers, but little is known about how best staff retention strategies are implemented with the intent to make them effective and sustainable. This study's findings may influence attention in that direction. Second, by comparing staff retention strategies in Zimbabwe's public and private universities with those of other universities and non-university organisations, the researcher generates new knowledge regarding measures to obviate staff retention challenges in the studied universities.

## Review of Related Literature

This section consists of selected glimpses of key findings derived from related studies around the globe. From the Asian experiences, Chendroyperumal (n.d) suggested thirty four (34) Pachatantra employee turnover and retention strategies in India. Nine retention strategies were fit for this study. First, do not hate employees. In this study, workers do not feel like leaving an organisation that shows love for them. Second, create bonds of unity between employees and management. In this study, employees are more likely to stay if they work as one family with the management. Third, Chendroyperumal advises managers to honour employees as a staff retention strategy. For this study, respected employees do not contemplate leaving the organisation. Fourth, institute a reward system to retain staff. In the context of this study, fair and adequate rewards are useful measures to retain staff. Fifth, match workers with work and position. For this study, matching workers with work and position helps in keeping them satisfied. Sixth, cherish employees by ensuring job security. In this study, job security could be one of the effective staff retention strategies. Seventh, help remove employees' sufferings to see the projects through. In this study, employees' welfare should be one of the major concerns of an employer. Eighth, differentiate between employees justly. For this study, treating employees fairly is a key staff retention strategy. Ninth, employees leave quickly when management grows absurd. Insensitive management drives away employees from an organisation.

In another Ghanaian study, Kwenin et al. (2013) studied the influence of employee rewards, human resources policies and job satisfaction on the retention of employees in Vodafone Ghana Limited. Kwenin et al. (2013:17) recommended the following staff retention challenges mitigation measures:

- The management of Vodafone Ghana Limited should as much as possible provide attractive and equitable reward packages that do not only attract employees but retain them in the organisation as well.
- …that management of the organisation provides intrinsic values in the jobs to make them more satisfying for the employees to say.
- Human resources policies were also identified to connect directly with retention, and are thus recommended that the company takes a second look at its policies to promote growth and opportunities for employees.

In an American study, Allen, Bryant and Vardaman (2010, p.58) cite Allen (2006) and Steel, Griffeth and Hom (2002) who found out that:

- there are two primary types of retention strategies: systemic strategies ;
- which are based on general principles of retention management and are intended;
- to help reduce turnover rates across the board, as well as targeted strategies based more specifically on organisation specific turnover drivers and are intended;
- to address organisation specific issues and often to influence turnover; and
- Among certain types of employees.

In the context of this study, there is paucity of studies related to measures to mitigate staff retention challenges in Europe. When comparing the attractiveness of the academic professions between European countries, salaries are naturally a key place to start (Jongbloed, 2012). When we compare European countries such as Italy, the United Kingdom, France, the Netherlands and Germany with the United States, and take into account international difference in purchasing power, Italy displays the widest salary range between, entry level, medium level and top level positions (Jongbloed, 2012). McCord (2014, p.71-5) came up with five measures to mitigate staff retention challenges:

- Trust people, not policies. Reward candour. And throw away the standard play book (p.71).
- Hire, reward and tolerate only fully formed adults (p.72).
- Tell the truth about performance (p.73).
- Managers own the job of creating great teams (p.74).
- Leaders own the job of creating the company culture (p.75).

The foregoing literature review findings demonstrate that staff retention strategies are both management-bound and employee-centred. They however did not clearly specify the type of managers involved in the crafting and implementing measures to obviate staff retention challenges. Salaries and the purchasing power of disposable income were a key measure to mitigate staff retention challenges in selected European universities (Jongbloed, 2012). The preceding findings focusing on training opportunities, professional development, competitive compensation plan and supervisor-employee relationships to name a few, give an account of measures to mitigate staff retention challenges particular to American settings. Key findings in Australia-Asian contexts were continuous development for the academics, developing new revenue sources, building institutional leadership capacity, and understanding the value of employees to name a few (Coates, Dobson, Edwards, Friedman, Goedegebuure and Meek, 2009; Seehra, 2013; Sohail, Muneer, Tanveer, and Tariq, 2011). Early research findings in the African settings have realised that individual universities and other organisations, as well as their employees have unique needs which must be met in order to retain employees. On the basis of the forgone findings, this exploration critiques pragmatic measures to obviate staff retention challenges in selected Zimbabwe's public and private universities on the basis of the perceptions of the Human Resources personnel.

## Research Methodology

This exploration has its roots in qualitative research for two reasons. The researchers sought to obtain Human Resources personnel's perceptions on the pragmatic measures to obviate staff retention challenges in selected Zimbabwe's public and private universities. The researchers sought to understand the situation in the studied institutions as it is constructed by the participants (Mhlanga, 2008). It was necessary to determine how the different players in each studied university constructed meaning (Mhlanga, 2008), regarding pragmatic measures to obviate staff retention challenges. In the qualitative paradigm, forms of relationship between and among social phenomena are believed to be holographic (i.e. multi-dimensional) and not simply linear as is the case in the dominant paradigm (Maykut and Morehouse, 1994 in Mhlanga, 2008, p. 68). It was fundamental for the researchers to understand how the various factors in the field interplay and how different stakeholders interact and interrelate in order to bring about specific pragmatic measures to obviate staff retention challenges in each of the studied university.

This exploration is guided by a case study research strategy for two reasons. First, the strength for using the case study approach lay in its ability to permit in-depth analysis of the intricate link between pragmatic measures to obviate staff retention challenges systems in place and how participants and actors viewed them. Second, the case study also enabled the researchers to gain an appreciation of how different contexts exert an impact on the pragmatic measures to obviate staff retention challenges in Zimbabwe's public and private universities from Human Resources personnel's perceptions.

Purposeful sampling suited the selection of two public universities and two private universities for one reason. Purposive sampling, as purposeful sampling is sometimes referred to in some research textbooks seeks information-rich cases which can be studied in great depth (Patton, 1990). The researchers carefully and consciously selected two public and two private universities in Zimbabwe which could provide rich information regarding pragmatic measures to obviate staff retention challenges on the basis of the perceptions of the Human Resources personnel. This enhanced a deep understanding of pragmatic measures to obviate staff retention challenges in selected Zimbabwe's public and private universities from the point of view of the Human Resources Personnel. The selected universities were coded Case 1, Case 2, Case 3 and Case 4.Cases 1 and 4 were public universities, while Cases 2 and 3 were private universities.

Three Human Resources personnel, that is, two from private universities and one from public university were selected using stakeholder sampling. The participants were coded Case 1HR participant, Case 2 HR participant and Case 3 HR participant. The other Human Resources personnel from one public university (Case 4) chose not to participate in the study for reasons best known to herself. This experience made the researchers to concur with Walliman (2006) who once observed that researchers should not always expect everyone to be willing to co-operate with them during the research process. Stakeholder sampling is useful when participants have the research –sought data (Kombo and Tromp, 2009). The three participants were deemed fit and adequate for the study because they provided data the researchers sought for the study. Stakeholder sampling is useful when participants have the research –sought data (Kombo and Tromp, 2009). Since the study was rooted in qualitative research, the researchers did not need to generalise findings on the sample. Thus, the numbers would not take the researchers to the bottom of participants' hearts for them to be able to arrive at ...an emphatic understanding of the feelings, motives and thoughts behind actors' actions (Maykut and Morehouse, 1994 in Mhlanga, 2008). Understanding such pragmatic measures to obviate staff retention challenges, according Mhlanga (2008), entailed understanding the relevant socio-political environments of the studied institutions and this could be best done through talking with the communities of the institutions.

The study's data generation was anchored on the use of the open-ended interview for two reasons. First, interviews enable researchers to gather thick descriptions of the phenomenon under study (Berg, 2010). Second, interviews enabled participants to open up in terms of giving their perceptions regarding the studied phenomenon (Creswell, 2012). The data generation was begun when the researchers got authority to visit the universities by the Permanent Secretary for the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education and the selected universities' registrars between July 2013 and August 2013.Consequent upon the use of interview method in this study, the researchers were able to generate thick descriptions of pragmatic measures to obviate staff retention challenges in selected Zimbabwe's public and private universities from the point of view of the Human Resources Personnel. The participants were interviewed three times each between September 2013 and December 2013 to find out whether they held the same perceptions or not regarding the studied phenomenon. This practice is consistent with the conduct of qualitative research which calls for prolonged stay in the research sites (Gray, 2009), and member checking (Marshall and Rossman, 2011).

The researchers relied on the NVivo data analysis software to analyse thick descriptions of pragmatic measures to obviate staff retention challenges in selected Zimbabwe's public and private universities from the point of view of the Human Resources Personnel. The researchers were able to detail phenomenon using NVivo data analysis output which had sorted, coded and categorised the research into summarised workable themes, sub-themes and their substantiations (Marshall and Rossman, 2011). This data analysis output enabled the researchers to come with a table (Table 1) under the section of findings and interpretation using an adopted and adapted approach from Chisaka and Kurasha (2012).

## Findings and Interpretation

### Pragmatic measures to mitigate staff retention challenges from the HR participants' perspective

The HR participants from two public and one private universities proposed some measures to mitigate staff retention challenges in their universities. Their perceptions are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1: Themes and their sub-themes regarding measures to mitigate staff retention challenges faced by studied universities from the HR participants' perspective**

| Themes | Sub-themes | Substantiating statements |
|---|---|---|
| **1.Increased funding** | 1.Increasing funding for contact leave, sabbatical leave as well as research | 1. The institution is to make sure that it increases funding for contact leave, sabbatical leave as well as research…(Case 1 HR). |
| **2.Remuneration** | 1.Ensuring that remuneration is competitive 2.Government's involvement in funding salaries 3.The university to offer competitive allowances | 1. There is need to ensure that remuneration is competitive all the time (Case 1 HR). 2...the Government has to play a role in paying lecturers… (Case 2 HR). 3. The HR suggested the need for the university to offer competitive allowances (Case 3 HR). |
| **3.Staff development** | 1.Continuously supported staff development | 1. Cases 1 and 2 HR participants concurred that their universities need to continuously support staff development. |
| **4.Enabling working environment** | 1.Enabling work environment in terms of resource provision | 1. The university to ensure all staff have appropriate office…space (Case 1 HR). 2. The accommodation offered is one bedroomed flat (Case 2 HR). 3. The main aspect…is to embrace an open door policy…operations of the institution (Case 3 HR). |
| **5.Staff/student ratios** | 1.Manageable student/lecturer ratios | 1…High rates tend to demotivate lecturers (Case 1 HR). 2…maintained at manageable to facilitate quality education (Case 2 HR). |
| **6.Developing strategic partners** | 1.Fostering diverse partnership with strategic development partners | 1…recommend that should foster partnerships with strategic development partners like UN agencies (Case 3 HR). |

**Adopted and adapted from Chisaka and Kurasha (2012, p. 7)**

Views obtained from the studied universities' HR participants reveal the following as the themes; increased funding, remuneration, staff development, enabling working environment, staff/student ratios, and developing strategic partners. The sub-themes for increased funding were; increasing funding for contact leave, sabbatical leave as well as research. The observed sub-themes for remuneration were; ensuring that remuneration is competitive, government involvement in funding salaries, and the university to offer competitive allowances. For staff development, the staff sub-theme was continuously supportive of staff development. As for a conducive working environment, the sub-theme was enabling working environment in terms of resource provision. In regard to staff/student ratios, the sub-theme was manageable student/lecturer ratios. Finally, for developing strategic partners, the sub-theme was; fostering diverse partnerships with the strategic development partners. The discussion of the above sub-themes among other themes in the subsequent paragraphs present measures to alleviate staff retention challenges by the studied universities.

**Increasing funding for contact and sabbatical leave, as well as research to retain staff**
On the question of increasing funding as a measure to retain staff in the universities, some HR participants called for the increasing of funds to cater for contact leave, sabbatical leave, as well as research funds. For example, the following measure was suggested by Case 1 HR participant from a public university point of view:

> *I mean…the first…requirement will be funding for activities like contact leave, sabbatical leave, as well as funding for research itself. Academics by themselves are researchers. So, if we give them funding for them to carry out research, they will be motivated and definitely they will be retained in the university...*

A similar perception is advanced by a private university HR participant at Case 3 who said:

> *Adequate funds for not only contact and sabbatical leave, but study leave should be sourced for lecturers who may be pursuing their PhD studies and undertaking researches.*

What is coming out from the above public and private university HR participants' suggestions is that provision of adequate money is the key route to effective enhancement of critical academic activities such as contact leave, sabbatical leave and research. These activities among others constitute the core business for the academics. They are heavily dependent on availability of adequate finances, as these findings support what Mupemhi and Mupemhi (2011) found out. While literature sometimes argues against the extent to which money is a staff retention enhancer, this study revealed that adequate money in the university is a pragmatic measure to mitigate staff retention challenges.

### Ensuring that remuneration is competitive to retain staff

Regarding the degree to which remuneration could be a measure to mitigate staff retention challenges, all HR participants underscored its importance in retaining staff. Below are the HR perspectives regarding the subject of competitive remuneration. Case 1 HR participant from a public university perspective said:

> *The next is about ...remuneration itself. Our academics need to be remunerated and be at par with other regional universities so that we can able to attract back those high professors, and high profile academics who are in the diaspora come back home. Because once their salaries are at the same level with those of other universities there would be no reason for them to be working abroad when they can get exactly the same benefits here at home.*

A similar perception is advanced by a private university HR participant at Case 3 when he said:

> *Our university always considers what other universities offer so as to remain competitive in retaining staff.*

The central point raised in the foregoing excerpts is that some public and private universities are claiming to be offering academics competitive salaries in order to attract and retain senior academics more than what their competitors do. These findings are consistent with Curran's (2012, p. 57) findings that more aggressive reward and recognition programmes were needed to retain staff. She also made three observations relevant to this study. First, a compensation policy that is merit-based is needed to retain staff. Second, rates should be benchmarked against other organisations in the same labour market. Third, high performance must be rewarded as this attracts and retains people.

### Offering competitive allowances to retain staff

In addition to the above, some HR participants proposed the increasing of allowances in a bid to make remuneration competitive enough to enable them to retain lecturers. Below is an HR participant's proposal on the subject in the context of his private university, Case 3 HR participant said:

> *There are many ways of mitigating staff retention challenges, some of them are partnerships. We have partnerships with UN agencies whereby we come up with a package which pays some of the lecturers' packages. We have partnerships with other developmental agencies that are also keen to see the retention of people of high calibre.*

While the findings talk about involvement of partnerships in providing staff with competitive allowances, Mupemhi and Mupemhi (2011, p. 39) made four observations of particular similarity to the preceding findings. First, they found out that MSU awards the highest incentive allowances in the country. Second, they observed that part-time teaching allowances are paid fortnightly and through separate pay slips. Third, all employees are on medical and funeral cover to which the university contributes 80%. Fourth, segment specific perks such as car, housing, cell phone etc do exist. The studied universities could learn a lot from Curran (2012) and Mupemhi and Mupemhi's (2011) findings on how to effectively retain lecturers in their universities.

### Government's involvement in remunerating staff in order to retain it

Notwithstanding the above perceptions on remuneration, another HR stressed the need for government involvement in the remuneration of staff at his private university. Case 2 HR participant said:

> *… at this point it was from another meeting where the Vice Chancellor was proposing to say, if the government could also assist the private university by paying salaries of lecturers. Of course, they might not pay, everyone, they might say those lecturers who are Zimbabweans, who are recruited within Zimbabwe, they are working in Zimbabwe they are able to meet their costs for those because you know as…we have a quota system where we invite the skills here…So far Zimbabweans in order to motivate internal staff it will be good for government if it will pay part of salaries of teaching staff…*

The preceding observations make three staff retention challenge mitigation measures from the point of view of private universities. First, private university lecturers would be retained if the government pays Zimbabwean lecturers and those recruited within Zimbabwe. Second, once government pays these lecturers salaries comparable to those of the public universities, the lecturers will be motivated to stay in the universities. These findings from public and private universities underscore the role of competitive remuneration and allowances in retaining staff. They also indicate public and private universities' sources of salaries, namely, the state for the former, and university boards and partnerships for the latter. They also portray that public universities ensure better job security and regular allowances, salaries and bonuses than private universities. Also, the findings suggest that government should pay private university lecturers' salaries because private universities also contribute to the development of national human capital, unity and harmony in the same manner public universities do. In that regard, private universities' lecturers also need to benefit from the tax payers' money in a similar manner their public university's counterparts do.

### Using staff development to retain staff

All HR participants also agreed that staff development has to be continuously supported in their universities. For instance, this is how Case 2 HR participant perceived the subject at his private university;

> *Staff development is there but because they have got staff development provision where one can go on an unpaid leave, but with the right to return to his job…you can go through unpaid leave for the purpose of personal development.*

In support of Case 2 HR participant's opinion, Case 1 HR participant at a public university asserted:

> *I think this has greatly assisted us to motivate our staff in the sense… our staff members….are allowed to study for any programme that is offered by…for free. Those who study or go for staff development outside…has not been able to assist them financially, but they have been given time off on salary so that they can develop themselves.*

The above two excerpts give two opposing views, although they are both indicating how staff development is useful to retain staff.  First, private universities use unpaid leave to help lecturers pursue academic development, while public universities use paid leave to promote the attainment of PhD studies. Second, the common perception among participants in both public and private universities is the role of staff development in enhancing human capital development in search of an identifiable university brand. These findings agree with Sokro (2012) who established that availability of career advancement opportunities was ranked second (71.3%) among reasons why respondents in his study decided to work for particular organisations. Staff development is undertaken by universities that are keen on human capital development of their staff in search of quality university education and positive university image.

### Using enabling working environment to retain staff

All HR participants acknowledged the efficacy of an enabling working environment to retain staff. According to Case 1 HR participant, this public university ensured all staff members have appropriate office space, furniture and related resources. The researcher observed that Case 1 does not offer housing to its lecturers. Similarly, Case 2 HR participant lamented that the accommodation of a one-bedroomed flat offered by his private university is not suitable for a big family. Therefore, he recommended that adequate accommodation be provided for staff members.

This finding is in contradiction with the researcher's observation of staff quarters which were shown to him by a friend based there, and Case 2 Returnee Lecturer 1's interview response in which she reported to have been given reasonable accommodation adding that two staff houses have been completed. The difference may be based on status lines because Case 2 Returnee Lecturer 1 is a Professor, while the researcher's friend was a mere lecturer. On that basis, access to resources and opportunities differs with status. Case 3 HR participant's view on enabling environment was to embrace an open policy in the day-to-day operations of this private institution. These findings confirm observations by Sokro (2012) suggesting that an enabling working environment alongside good working conditions and career for advancement placed an organisation ahead of others in terms of talent attraction and retention. The study revealed that Case 2 had the best enabling working environment because of its state of the art infrastructure and facilities while it was difficult to compare Case 1 and 3 with Case 2, because of their multi-campus nature. Case 4 had equally good enabling working environment which was being continuously upgraded. It can be deduced that provision of an enabling working environment is one of the key pragmatic measures to mitigate staff retention challenges in the studied universities.

### Using strategic development partners to mitigate staff retention challenges

One other key measure to mitigate staff retention challenges faced by the studied universities concerned using strategic development partners to mitigate staff retention. In elucidating this subject, Case 3 HR participant said about this private university:

> ...it would be important that the university should foster partnerships with strategic development partners like UN agencies.

The preceding finding is buttressed by documentary evidence at a public university, Case 4 Strategic Plan (2012-2015) which indicates that apart from partnering with UN agencies, the university can also enter into private public partnerships. Strategic partners have the capacity to boost university funds through funding university projects in faculties or consultancy not only in private universities but in public ones as well. On the basis of the above evidence, one other pragmatic measure to mitigate staff retention challenges in the public and private universities under study is that lecturers can be retained if they get extra income through research and consultancy work.

### Using manageable staff/student ratios to retain staff

One other area which could be a source of dissatisfaction in the studied universities pertained staff/student ratios. All HR participants were of the perception that all lecturers who supervise more than 10 research students have a work overload. The solution to this challenge, which affects actual teaching, research and internship supervision, is to increase part-time lecturers with relevant expertise and experience. It can be argued that private and public universities' lecturers would be easily retained in situations where there are manageable staff/student ratios which translate to manageable workloads. Thus, both public and private universities agree on two things. First, high enrolment rates demotivate lecturers. Second, maintenance of tutor/student ratios at manageable levels is a pre-condition to quality education. The findings tally with Salopek's (2000) view in Netswera, Rankhumise and Mavundla (2005, p. 37) that critical elements viewed to be important in any organisation have to effect good employee retention exercise, "Not burning workers out…." Within the context of this study, workers burn out when high tutor/student ratios increase lecturers' workload in terms of tutoring, research and practicum supervision at the expense of equally important pillars of academic business namely, research and community service. Therefore, it can be deduced from the foregoing findings and literature that using manageable staff/student ratios is among valuable pragmatic measures to mitigate staff retention challenges in the studied universities.

### Summary of Findings

#### Pragmatic measures to mitigate staff retention challenges faced by Zimbabwe's public and private universities

With respect to pragmatic measures to mitigate staff retention challenges in public and private universities, increased funding, housing and car loans, supportive university management, and document staff retention strategies were among nine measures the universities used to retain their staff. Two differences between public and private universities' pragmatic measures to mitigate staff retention challenges related to sources of funds and engagement of external partners.

### Similarities

### (a) Stakeholder involvement

Pragmatic measures to alleviate staff retention challenges faced by Zimbabwe's public and private universities called for the need for a concerted approach by all stakeholders in the overall development of the universities if staff retention challenges were to be curtailed.

### (b) Increased funding

Increased funding for research, study leave and contact and sabbatical leave, remuneration, staff development opportunities, provision of adequate and appropriate resources, and an enabling working environment were identified by all participants as the major pragmatic measures to mitigate staff retention challenges. All universities need money to retain staff.

### (c) Using manageable student/tutor ratios

Manageable student/tutor ratios and the need to develop strategic partners and governance are deemed significant enough to warrant observation as far as management of staff retention in the studied universities is concerned.

### (d) Housing and car loans

Provision of housing and car loans in which the university acts as a guarantor is necessary to retain staff in public and private university settings. Also, capitalisation of universities produces extra income for private and public university lecturers is a pragmatic measure to mitigate staff retention challenges.

### (e) Written down staff retention strategies

Staff retention policies/strategies need to be written down in search of transparency in both kinds of universities. Certainly, written down policies are preferable pragmatic measures to mitigate staff retention challenges in the studied universities. One cannot run higher education institutions on the basis of informality if provision of university education is to be a serious business.

### (f) Supportive university management

University leaders and lecturers themselves were found to be key players in promoting staff retention at their universities. Supportive management was perceived to be a critical requirement in public and private universities willing to retain lecturers.

### (g) Involvement of strategic partners

The involvement of the Government and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), including other strategic partners such as United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), World Health Organisation (WHO), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) and Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) to name a few, can benefit the financial coffers of the studied universities very well if opportunities are properly explored and exploited.

### Differences

### (a) Sources of funds

Although private universities had their sources of funds, they were in need of government funds to pay lecturers' salaries.

### (b) Need for external partners

While public universities were funded by the state they also needed external partners to fund key university operations which the government cannot fund alone, especially, in the wake of the current macro-economic challenges the country is undergoing through.

## Conclusions
***Conclusions regarding pragmatic measures to mitigate staff retention challenges in the studied universities***
In view of the findings examined in the earlier two sections, one major conclusion is made with reference to strategies to mitigate staff retention challenges. Provision of adequate funds and engagement of diverse strategic partners can mitigate staff retention strategies.

### (i)     Similarities
Eight similar conclusions regarding pragmatic measures to mitigate staff retention challenges in the studied universities are put forward below.
- Money, staff development, career growth and research opportunities are among the hallmarks of effective staff retention in public and private universities.
- Engagement of diverse strategic partners is one of the routes to effective staff retention in public and private universities.
- Striking a balance between the provision of intrinsic and extrinsic benefits is essential since the study found out that monetary and non-monetary benefits play a complementary role in retaining staff.
- Manageable student/tutor ratios could increase job satisfaction, motivation and commitment to the job.
- Universities which recognise the value of their lecturers as key human resources motivate the lecturers to be committed to their jobs.
- Supportive university management is a critical staff retention strategy in the studied universities.
- Universities ensuring that lecturers who actually work and earn rewards for their hard work are key players in enhancing staff retention in public and private universities, hence, the need for performance-based pay.
- Lastly, public and private universities need to find ways of providing lecturers with study, contact and sabbatical leave in order to retain them.

### (ii)     Differences

Four conclusions revealing differences based on pragmatic measures to mitigate staff retention challenges in the studied universities are advanced below.
- Public universities appeared more readily welcoming to external partners to fund their university business operations, while private universities consider proposals to receive government funding.
- Private universities were less proactive in providing their staff with accommodation than what public universities were doing.
- Private universities had less effective communication channel practices than public universities.
- Private universities seemed to be depriving their lecturers of staff development, research and career growth opportunities more than their public university counterparts.

## Recommendations
The researchers came up with three recommendations on the basis of this exploration's findings and conclusions.
1. The Government needs to be involved in the funding operations of private universities in the similar manner it does to private schools by paying lecturers' salaries and giving grants and scholarships because it is the government's duty to educate its citizens.
2. There is need for increased funding in both sets of the universities through vigorous stakeholder involvement and partnerships to bail university authorities from being the sole sources of university funds. Availability of adequate funds is a signpost to effective pragmatic measures to obviate staff retention challenges in many a university, regardless its type.
3. Further studies in staff retention strategies in universities need to be conducted on a wider scale to establish how universities in the country are managing the retention of their academic staff. The study did not explore how different groups in terms of sex, age, educational qualifications and work experience are

motivated to be retained.  This would be an area for further study to provide institutions with ideas on how to motivate the different groups of lecturers in the institutions.

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