Employee Perceptions and Intention to Leave Among Academic Staff in Public Universities in Kenya

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Abstract

Purpose: The specific objectives of the study included perceived organizational support, commitment, performance and perceived organizational support as predictors of intention to leave.

Methodology: The descriptive survey research designs was adopted. The population consisted of all cadres of academic staff in the chosen three public universities in Western Kenya. Yamane's (1967) formula was utilised in determining a sample size of 121 respondents. Purposive sampling technique was utilised in coming up with the sample. Questionnaires were used to obtain primary data for analysis. A pilot study was done on 5% of the sample and Cronbach's alpha helped in testing reliability. Both face and content validity of the research instrument were checked. Descriptive and inferential statistics of frequencies, means and standard deviation and inferential technique were utilised to analyse quantitative data using SPSS.

Findings: The results revealed that perceived organizational support had a negative significant relationship with intention to leave. Perceived commitment, performance and manager support were all positively related with intention to leave.

Unique Contribution to Theory, Policy and Practice: The study recommends that universities should assess and improve employee perceptions if they want to influence them to stay longer with the firms.

Keywords: *Turnover Intention, Organizational Commitment, Supervisor Support, Calling, Organizational Performance.*

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

In work environments characterized by feelings of insecurity, employees may feel that their employers cannot guarantee them on-going employment and they may consequently take charge of the situation by making themselves more employable. They therefore no longer feel any loyalty towards the organization and would leave the organization in pursuit of better opportunities (van der Vaart *et al*, 2015).

Organizations are considered respectable when they adopt appropriate practices to retain the employees (Pepe, 2010). Employee retention is seen as a successful investment within different organizations due to the high expense of recruiting different employees. Alzayed and Murshid (2017) noted that understanding the factors that influence the employee's intention to leave their present employment is crucial as a means of improving the human resource practices in the public organizations. Lacap (2020) observed that various studies have identified why employees leave their jobs. Most studies focus of the actual turnover but intention to quit has been said to be a vital factor for such behavior.

Ayalew *et al* (2021) studied Nurses' intention to leave their job in sub-Saharan Africa. Their results showed that internal and external brain drain factors were the main reason for nurses' intention to leave their job. So far, in Sub Sahara Africa, several observational studies have been done on nurses' intention to leave their job. However, a comprehensive review that would have a lot of evidence for designing an intervention is lacking.

Seid (2022) looked at intentions to leave and associated factors among Health Professionals in Health Centers in Ethiopia. They observed that organizations need to be aware of the primary causes of the employees' intention to quit if it hopes to lessen the magnitude of that intention. In addition to job satisfaction, other factors, such as work pressure, the workplace environment, and organizational management, can have an impact on a health worker's decision to leave a public health center. Their results showed that 61% health professionals had intention to leave and that this was a very high percentage.

Kamau *et al* (2021) studied teachers' turnover intentions: role of HRM practices in public secondary schools in Kenya. The study findings indicated that compensation and training significantly influenced turnover intentions while career development and performance appraisal insignificantly influenced public secondary schools' teachers' turnover intentions.

Jeza (2018) looked at factors influencing intention to leave among employees in Sportpesa Company. The results showed that perceived organizational support contributed 45 per cent of intention to leave among employees. Other factors included compensation, job satisfaction and leadership style. Mulievi and Wanyama (2019) examined the relationship between safety practices and employee retention in the health sector in Kenya and found a positive and significant correlation. Mbaabu *et al.* (2021) recommended that organizations should offer employees'

bonuses, conduct salary surveys for benchmarking, compensate for performance, and allocate training opportunities fairly among all employees.

Mwangi and Nzulwa (2019) assessed internal organizational factors on employee retention and found that culture, leadership, strategy, and structure all positively impact retention. Other studies have explored career development and retention (Sitati et al., 2016), talent retention (Wainaina *et al.*, 2022), and work-life balance and retention (Nasimiyu and Egesa, 2021).

Research Objectives

The general objective of this study was to examine the influence of employee perceptions and intention to leave among academic staff in public Universities in Kenya.

The study was guided by the following specific objectives:

   i.   To assess the influence of perceived organizational support on intention to leave among academic staff in public Universities in Kenya.
   ii. To establish whether perceptions of organizational commitment affects intention to leave among academic staff in public Universities in Kenya.
   iii. To establish the influence of perceived organizational performance on intention to leave among academic staff in public Universities in Kenya.
   iv. To assess the effect of perceived management support on intention to leave among academic staff in public Universities in Kenya.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework

Theory of Reasoned Action

This theory was developed by Ajzen and Fishbein, (1980). The theory aims to explain the relationship between attitudes and behaviors within human action. The TRA was meant to predict individual intentions to engage in particular behaviours a specific time and within diverse contexts.

The three most important components of the theory of reasoned action are beliefs, attitudes, and intentions. Beliefs usually describe the probability that a person thinks some action will cause a certain outcome; attitudes concern whether or not someone thinks that outcome is favorable or unfavorable; and intention is the way that someone intends to behave in response to beliefs and attitudes.

Fishbein and Ajzen (1985) proposed a hierarchy for the theory of reasoned action. They believed that attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavior control all contribute to intention, which leads to some extent to behavior. The behavioral, normative, and control beliefs underlying these are influenced by external variables such as demographics and personality.

This theory will be used in this study to explain how perceptions can lead to certain consequences or actions by the employee. The specific areas it considers will include perceived organizational commitment, perceived management support and perceived organizational performance.

Organizational support Theory

According to Organizational Support Theory, perceived organizational support would be affected by diverse aspects of an employee's treatment and would, in turn, influence the employee's inferences concerning the reasons for that treatment (Eisenberger et al., 1986). Employees believe that the organization has a general positive or negative orientation toward them that encompasses both recognition contributions and concern for their welfare. (Eisenberger et al, 2002). As it emphasized employees' beliefs that the organization values their contributions and well-being, there is a great deal of empirical evidence that suggests perceived organizational support is associated with many desirable outcomes such as turnover intention, performance, leadership behavior, job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Dawley et.al, 2008; Allen et.al, 2007; Eisenberger & Shanock, 2006; Yuann et al., 2010).

In organizations, supervisors can be viewed as first-line representatives of the organization to the subordinate. Therefore, any types of values or standards held by the organization are thought to be maintained in the organization through supervisors.

Fulfillment Theory

Schaffer (1953) proposed the fulfillment theory of job satisfaction, which suggests that job satisfaction depends on the extent to which an individual's needs and desires are satisfied in their job. This theory takes into account the strength of an individual's needs and desires, as well as their ability to visualize and utilize opportunities for satisfaction within their job situation.

The theory proposes that our lives go well to the extent that we succeed in terms of what matters to us emotionally, reflectively, and over the long term. In other words, well-being consists in fulfilling or realizing our appropriate values over time.

The theory will be applied in this study to explain intention to stay or leave the organization since they are based on an individual's belief in how they feel valued or appreciated in the organization or the lack of it altogether.

Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework is a research tool intended to assist a researcher to develop awareness and understanding of the situation under scrutiny and to communicate this. When clearly articulated, a conceptual framework has potential usefulness as a tool to assist a researcher to make meaning of subsequent findings (Tromp & Kombo, 2016). In this study, employee perceptions of the organization will be measured using four constructs namely perceived organizational support, perceptions of commitment, perceived complexity and perceived management support. The dependent variable is intention to leave among academic staff in public universities in Kenya. The operationalization of the variables is shown in Figure 2.1 below.

Independent Variable   **Dependent Variable**
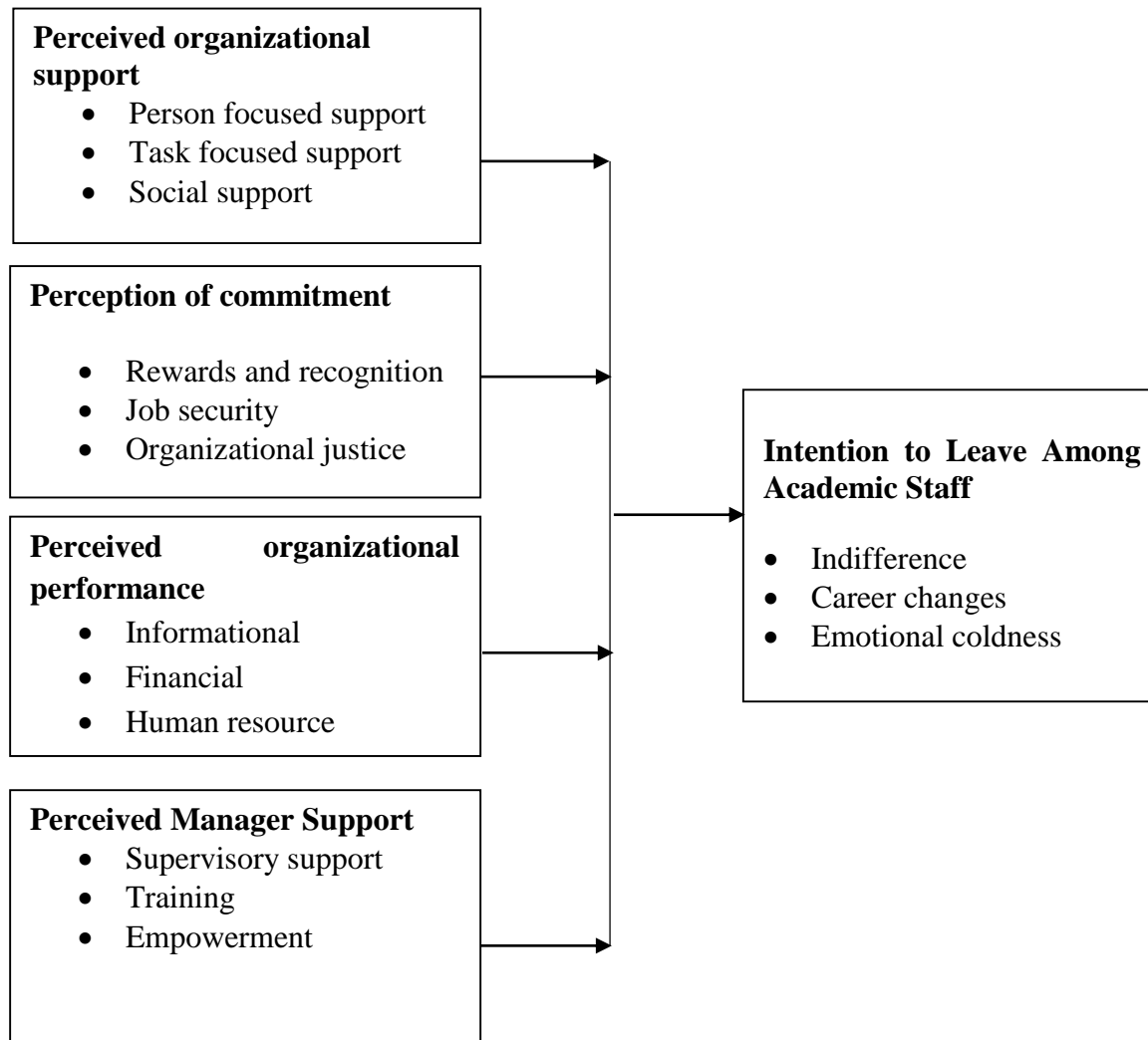
Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Research Gaps

The existing literature suggests that intent to leave is a commonly studied phenomenon. However, the determinants (Alsaber & Alqatan, 2023) and outcomes for these two aspects have been most studied and related. Therefore, it is suggested that by intentionally bringing satisfiers and commitment stimulators, organizations can benefit by controlling or eliminating such intentions (Halawi, 2014).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The descriptive survey design was employed where data was collected one point in time. This study targeted academic staff of four public universities in Western Kenya. The selected universities had a total population of 535 academic staff. The sampling frame for this study

included 535 academic staff of the selected four Universities. This study used Yamane's (1967) formula to determine the sample size given the size of the population. This study adopted the use of primary data collection methods. This study used some semi-structured questionnaires to obtain primary data for analysis. A pilot study was done to determine whether the participants understand the questions as intended, followed by a review of the questions. The study used both face and content validity. Content validity was established by subjecting the instrument to double-checking to ensure that the questionnaire covers all the measures of the study variables. The data collection procedure involved getting an introduction letter from the University authorizing data collection from targeted non-academic members of staff in the chosen university. Also, before data collection the researcher obtained an authorization letter from the selected University. Consent was then sought from the eligible staff to participate in the study. This study applied quantitative approaches to process and analyze the data.

PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Descriptive Statistics

According to Cooper and Schindler (2013), descriptive statistics are used for the purpose of defining and describing the characteristics inside a data collection. The use of frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations of research variables are the foundations upon which descriptive statistics are presented. On a scale consisting of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), respondents were asked to indicate the degree to which they agreed with the statement. Following the presentation of the frequencies in parentheses is the standard deviation, denoted by the letter SD.

Descriptive Results for Perceived Organizational Support

Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement by ticking each one of the given statements regarding their perceptions of organizational support: The results are as shown in Table 4.9.

Table 4. 9: Perceived Organizational Support

Statements	1 (%)	2(%)	3(%)	4(%)	5(%)	Mean	S. D
I can fulfill my personal needs while working in the university	2.8	4.9	14.8	40.8	36.6	4.04	0.99
I get an extra allowance from the university for my efforts	2.8	16.2	9.2	27.5	44.4	3.94	1.20
My boss wants to be responsible for my mistakes	3.5	11.3	12.0	38.0	35.2	3.90	1.11
My boss gives regular feedback on my work	2.8	11.3	12.0	38.0	35.9	3.93	1.09
I get an award for my achievements	2.8	8.5	8.5	47.2	33.1	3.99	1.01
I am given the opportunity for promotion if my performance is very good							
I have very supportive colleagues	2.8	12.7	8.5	40.1	35.9	3.94	1.10
I have adequate facilities to support my work							

The first questionnaire item received the highest mean score of 4.04, with the majority of respondents (40.8% agreeing and 36.6% strongly agreeing) affirming that they are able to fulfil their personal needs while working in the university. The respondents also agreed (mean 3.99) that they are given opportunities for promotion when their performance is very good. Supervisors were also commended (mean 3.94) for giving regular feedback on employees work. Generally, the employees had a positive perception of their organizations.

Descriptive Results on Perceived Organizational Commitment

Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement by ticking each one of the given statements as they apply to their institution's commitment towards their staffs. The findings are shown in table 4.10 below.

Table 4. 1: Perception of Commitment

Collateral requirement	1(%)	2(%)	3(%)	4(%)	5(%)	Mean	S.D
I think of my colleagues at the university as a new family	8.5	9.2	26.8	23.2	32.4	3.62	1.26
I am proud to be part of this university	7.7	21.8	14.1	30.3	26.1	3.45	1.30
I want to stay in the university because of the benefits I get while working	6.3	9.9	27.5	25.4	31.0	3.65	1.20
I feel the university takes good care of my work needs	7.7	11.3	21.1	26.8	33.1	3.66	1.26
I want to spend my entire career in the university	10.6	15.5	21.8	24.6	27.5	3.43	1.32
I realized that I had to advance the interests of the university	7.0	14.8	21.8	23.9	32.4	3.60	1.27

That respondents thought of their colleagues at the university as a new family had a mean score of 3.62, indicating a moderate agreement among respondents. While 32.4% of respondents strongly agree and 23.2% agree with this statement, a significant percentage (26.8%) remains neutral, and 17.7% disagree. The standard deviation of 1.26 suggests a fair amount of variability in responses, likely reflecting differing perceptions of the statement.

This variable largely drew moderate to neutral responses with only the feeling that the university was taking some good care of staff needs leaning towards agreement with a mean of 3.66. The respondents did not feel very proud to be part of the university with a low mean of 3.45, were neutral about the statement that they want to stay in the university because of the benefits they get while working with a mean of 3.65 and many not keen to spend their entire career in the university with a mean of 3.43.

Perceived Organizational Performance

Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement by ticking each one of the given statements as they apply to perceptions of organizational performance. The results are as shown in Table 4.11 below.

Table 4. 2: Descriptive Results on Perceived Organizational Performance

Lending procedure	1(%)	2(%)	3(%)	4(%)	5(%)	Mean	S.D
The university provides timely information that supports my work	2.1	28.2	6.3	28.9	34.5	3.65	1.27
The financial health of my university does not worry me	6.3	21.8	7.7	24.6	39.4	3.69	1.35
The management treat academic staffs with dignity and respect	4.2	20.4	5.6	29.6	40.1	3.81	1.28
The university strengthens the culture of education and development which reinforces the motivation to transfer knowledge into practice	4.2	23.2	7.7	20.4	44.4	3.77	1.34
The recruitment procedures ensure fairness and transparency	2.1	10.6	9.9	33.1	44.4	4.07	1.08
The university embraces ways to attract, manage and retain talented staff The university has a balanced and diverse team of workers	4.2	10.6	7.7	33.1	44.4	4.03	1.15

According to the findings in the table 4.11, the respondents felt very strongly that the recruitment procedures ensured fairness and transparency with a mean score of 4.07, suggesting moderate agreement with perceptions of fairness. The standard deviation of 1.08 reflects moderate variability in responses, suggesting different experiences among respondents. This could be due to variations in individual experiences of their organizations.

The respondents also perceived that management treated staffs with dignity and respect on many occasions. This was shown by a mean score of 3.81 and a collective per cent of 69.7 of those who agreed. The universities were also commended for strengthens the culture of education and development which reinforces the motivation to transfer staff knowledge into practice. However, the statement that the university provides timely information that supports employees work attracted neutral responses with a mean of 3.69.

Perceived Manager Support

Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement by ticking each one of the given statements as they apply to respondents' perceived manager support. The results are as shown in Table 4.12.

Table 4. 3: Descriptive Results on Perceived Manager Support

PMS statements	1(%)	2 (%)	3(%)	4(%)	5(%)	Mean	S.D
I hold my supervisor in high regard	3.5	2.1	16.2	39.4	38.7	4.08	0.98
My supervisor gives me the chance to make important decisions	3.5	17.6	13.4	26.8	38.7	3.80	1.23
My supervisor values my contributions in the department	3.5	23.2	14.8	23.2	35.2	3.63	1.27
My supervisor gives me the authority to try new things	3.5	1.4	19.0	45.1	31.0	3.99	0.94
I can talk about my problems with my supervisors	3.5	2.8	17.6	39.4	36.6	4.03	0.99
My supervisor handles conflict between staff quite well	5.6	9.9	14.8	32.4	37.3	3.86	1.19

According to the findings in the table 4.12, respondents agreed that they held their supervisors with high regard with a mean score of 4.08, indicating strong agreement that relationships with supervisors contributes greatly to positive attitudes at work. The low standard deviation of 0.98 suggests a high level of consensus among respondents, indicating that most respondents perceive that supervisor support is beneficial to the employees in terms of their longevity in the organizations.

The employees showed strong agreement with the statement that their supervisors offered them the opportunity to discuss their work related problems (mean of 4.03). Furthermore, the respondents agreed that their supervisors provided them with the authority to try out new things at work. This was supported by a mean of 3.99. A good number also supported the statement that their managers gave them opportunities to make decisions at work. Generally, the respondents had reasonable work environments with their superiors and this seemed to create a conducive work environment.

Intention to Leave

Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement by ticking each one of the given statements as they apply to their intention to leave. The results are as shown in Table 4.13.

Table 4. 4: Descriptive Results on Intention to Leave

	SD%	D%	N%	A%	SA%	Mean	Std. Dev
I am considering leaving my current job within the next year.	1.7	5.2	28.9	41.4	22.8	3.97	0.85
I have unstable and intense work relationships	2.2	7.3	19.4	46.1	25	3.83	0.79
I am unwilling to do this job again.	6.9	69	13.8	5.6	4.7	2.32	0.87
I will seek another job at another institution	3.4	4.3	4.3	47.8	40.1	4.17	0.95
I would like to leave my current job and seek a long-term job opportunity elsewhere.	0	3.4	6.9	65.5	24.1	4.10	0.66
I am not satisfied with my current wage	10.3	54.7	23.7	5.6	5.6	2.41	0.95
I am not satisfied with the current content of my job	0.9	4.7	6.9	51.3	36.2	4.17	0.82
I am not satisfied with the system in my current work unit	0.4	4.7	18.1	52.2	24.6	3.96	0.81
I have a feeling of inadequacy and hypersensitivity to criticism or rejection	13.8	64.7	9.5	5.6		2.24	0.94
I have emotional coldness and detachment from social relationships	1.7	3.9	25.9	41.4	27.2	3.89	0.91
I often feel indifferent to praise and criticism.	3.4	61.2	25.9	6	3.4	2.45	0.80
Valid N (listwise)			232				

SD = Strongly Disagree D = Disagree N = Neutral A = Agree SA = Strongly Agree

Std. Dev = Standard Deviation

The respondents agreed with the statement that they were not satisfied with the current content of their jobs with a mean of 4.17. This was the highest mean score indicating that staff are not satisfied with their present work environment.

That respondents were not satisfied with the systems in their current work units had the second highest mean score of 3.96 and a standard deviation of 0.08, this item indicates strong agreement that staff were unhappy. The low standard deviation of 0.81 suggests a strong consensus among respondents, indicating that most staffs have had negative experiences with their work environment.

Conclusions

Based on the empirical evidence, several logical conclusions can be made as follows per specific objectives.

The study found that perceived organizational support had a significant negative impact on intention to leave. The negative correlation indicated that as perceptions of organizational support increased, the intention to leave among academic staffs deteriorated. This underscores the need for more stable and supportive organizations.

The study reveals that perceived organization commitment significantly influenced intention to leave. The positive correlation and regression analysis confirm that an increase in perceptions of commitment positively impacts intention to leave. Therefore, better management of employee perceptions is necessary to improve their desire to stay in the organization.

The study also highlighted a significant positive influence of perceptions of organizational performance on intention to leave. The strong correlation and regression analysis confirm that improvements in organizational performance are essential for enhancing the employees perceptions of the organization and so their desire to remain.

The study's findings indicate a significant positive influence of perceived manager support on intention to leave. The positive correlation and regression analysis confirm that supervisor support substantially contributes to the desire by employees to remain longer with the organizations. As a result, the initial null hypothesis, which proposed no significant influence of perceived manager support, was rejected.

Recommendations

 Academic institutions should aim to improve and influence employee perceptions regarding the support they receive from their organizations. This would motivate them to work harder in order to improve the overall success of the firm and help them achieve even more.

Organizations should strive to ensure that they raise their levels of commitment towards the individual and collective needs of their staff. This would enhance a positive work environment geared towards ensuring that staff feel valued and supported by their employers and would, in turn, keep them glued to the companies a bit longer.

Public universities should strive to ensure they remain productive (performance) and stable so that their staff feel secure and safe in their jobs. This would facilitate greater scope for success and build confidence in their staff and thereby enhance the overall efficiency of the organization. This

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could include increasing staff capacity or implementing solutions that cater for worker welfare and boost their perceptions of desired performances.

Supervisors and managers should also invest in robust support and information sharing programs which would ensure timely and accurate access to employee support. This will facilitate better working relationships, open sharing and create a conducive environment for learning and development.

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