

## Training as a Determinant of Employee Retention at a South African Higher Learning Setting

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**Abstract:** High labour turnover in organisations has significantly posed some problems. This is observed, especially when highly skilled employees leave organisations in pursuit of so called greener pastures which in turn creates a knowledge gap in most organisations. The study investigated the influence of training as a determinant of employee retention among academic staff members at a selected higher learning institution in South Africa. The study employed a quantitative research approach and questionnaires were used to collect data. The sample comprised of 129 academic staff members and the data was analysed through descriptive and inferential statistics. Research findings revealed that there is a relationship between training and employee retention but there is no significant mean difference on the employee intention to leave on the basis of their age.

**Key words:** Training, employee retention, academic staff, higher education institutions, employee, quantitative

### INTRODUCTION

The demand for academic staff in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) is increasing. Regardless of the increasing need for academic staff, retention of academics is an intensifying problem in higher education institutions (Pienaar and Bester, 2008). Based on information from the Higher Education South Africa (2011) (HESA) and existing literature it is observed that higher education institutions are faced with challenges in trying to keep their valuable human capital (Hesa, 2011).

As such in an attempt to remain competitive in this current global economy, higher education institutions regard the aspect of employee retention as the most important ingredient in the success of any institution (Chen, 2014). Thus, providing adequate and relevant training is said to be one of the strategies organisations can use in enhancing employee retention (Ahmad and Bakar, 2003). Chen (2014) further stipulates that training motivates employees to be committed as such they are enthused to reciprocate to their employers by staying loyal to their organisations. Furthermore, one school of thought ascertains that training leads to an increase in employee turn over whereas others argue that training is actually a tool that can lead to higher levels of employee retention (Becker, 1993; Collarelli and Montei, 1996). However, regardless of where an individual may fall within such a debate, most scholars agree that training is actually a complex human resource practice that can have a significant influence on an organisations success (Brum, 2007).

**Literature review:** The concept of employee training (Armstrong, 2000), defined training as an organised process to amend employee proficiencies, so that, they can be able to achieve their objectives. For this study, training was defined as a set of activity which reacts to present needs and is focused on developing individual and organisational potential as well as building capabilities for the future (Reynolds, 2004). Training does not only imply on equipping employees with the necessary skills needed to perform their jobs effectively, rather it should be viewed as a representative of an employer's commitment to their employees (Nishii *et al.*, 2008). According by Bassi and Buren (1999), they report that most of the well performing companies have realised that their provisions for training form the basis of their ability to attract and retain best employees.

**Significance of training:** Since, employees are the most valuable resources in an organisation who have an influence of maintaining organisations profitability and competition as well (Arthur, 2001). Reputable organisations tend to provide training to their employees for them to tailor complex circumstances (Luke, 2011). Additionally, training is perceived as valuable not only to the organisation but also to the employee as well. Training is well known for equipping workers with particular skills (Chew and Chan, 2008). Relatively, Landsman (2004), also maintained the view that training is actually a valuable activity which enhances skills. Therefore, training is said to be one of the explanations of why employees may choose to stay in an organisation.

Similarly (Rosser, 2004), posits that training opportunities for employees will always be a crucial aspect with regard to their professional lives.

According to Nassazi (2013), all human resource development activities are meant to either improve an individual's performance on their present job or to enrich the individual with new skills for a new job or new position as well as for general growth of both individuals and the organisation. Furthermore, Nel *et al.* (2011), stated that there are two distinct methods that organisations may decide on to train and develop employee's skills. These are, on-the-job training which is given to organisational employees while conducting their everyday research at the same workplace or research environment. On the other hand off-the-job training encompasses taking employees away from their usual research environments and as they undergo training. Few examples, of the on-job training methods are job rotation, coaching, mentoring. Conferences and role playing are also examples for off the job training (Armstrong, 2000). According to Nel *et al.* (2011) training is also associated with several benefits such as improved profitability and enhances positive attitudes towards profit orientation, increased job knowledge and skills at all organisational levels and fosters a better corporate image.

**Conceptualisation of employee retention:** Employee retention refers to the ability of an organisation to retain its employees. Mckeown states that when employees leave an organisation they create knowledge gap thereby posing a negative impact on the organisations success. In the present study, employee retention is therefore defined as an employee's desire to remain in an organisation and a company's capability to keep valuable employees who effectively contribute to the business success (Damayanti, 2009).

Employee retention is a voluntary move by an organisation to create an atmosphere which absorbs and engage employees for long a term (Chaminade, 2007). The main reason for retaining employees is to avoid the loss of proficient employees from the organisation because it might have a negative impact on the organisations success. One of the pressing issues in human resources literature is that employers ought to retain and develop their human resources in an attempt to attain a competitive advantage. This is important because employee turn over is now an increasing challenge, especially organisations employing academics like in tertiary institutions (Young, 2010). Hong and Kaur also, state that it is usually in a company's best interest to put more energy in retaining their quality employees.

**The significance of employee retention:** Increased employee turnover creates insecurities and exerts much work load and stresses to the remaining staff as a result job dissatisfaction is also promoted thereby facilitating the turnover cycle (Moseley *et al.*, 2008). As such retaining quality employees is essential for any existing organisation (Close, 2008). Dalziel (2010), noted that organisations which invest in training their staff frequently are likely to benefit from lower employee turn over as employees remain in the organisation for longer. Hence, a successful retention strategy must comprise of training opportunities (Roberts and Outley, 2002). Kaye and Evans (2009), mentions that employee retention has thus, become more important due to aspects such as scarcity of skills, availability of several or new employment options, high costs associated with employee turnover and recruitment and loss of knowledgeable employees.

**Relationship between training and employee retention:** Messmer (2000) found that one of the most vital elements in employee retention is investment on employee training and career development. Employees who obtain sufficient job training are likely to be efficient when executing their duties. That is the reason why organisations should invest in training those employees whom they anticipate to get a return on investment in the long run. Tomlinson (2002) is of the view that organisations can be on a leading edge in this competitive environment by having well trained employees in the latest technologies. When employees feel that training is available at all times, they tend to develop a sense of emotional attachment and commitment to their organisations as a result, they are less likely to leave their jobs (Ashar *et al.*, 2013). In addition, Izba (2010) points out that the idea of training employees cannot be viewed as a costly or expensive practice but rather as a valuable and critical organisational practice. On the same vein, employee training enhances employee motivation, commitment as well as their retention as they appreciate that the organisation is assisting them in achieving their career goals (Chen, 2014). Furthermore, when employers provide opportunities for training and support regarding career development, they help create employee development and drive employee retention as well (Mone and London, 2014).

As such a study by Srinivas (2008) among mid-career employees in the united states revealed that there is a strong relationship between training opportunities in organisations and sustainable employee retention. Again in a survey conducted by Ooi and Arumugam (2006) among Malaysian employees in a private sector it was discovered that indeed training does have a significant

relationship with employee retention. While, Bashir and Ramay (2008) who conducted a similar study among employees in Pakistan, support that employee training is one of the human resource practices that plays a role in enhancing employee retention. These studies reveal the existence of a positive and significant relationship between training and employee retention rate. Ramlall (2003) ascertained that insufficient training opportunities forced employees to quit from their current jobs.

According to the APTA. (2009), it was suggested that for organisations to be successful they should pay special attention on employee training, so as to retain those employees. On the other hand, a study by Terera and Ngirande (2014) among academic staff members in tertiary institutions revealed that there is no statistically significant association between training and employee retention amongst employees. This simply implies that training may not be the only significant determinant of employee retention among employees in an organisation. In support of this, a study by Pare *et al.* (2001) among information technology specialists in Canada indicated that training to be negatively related to employee retention. This is similar to the literature by Jiang and Klein (1999) who stated that training opportunities do not necessarily enhance employee retention because employees regard them as hygiene factors which are necessary to be available although their availability does not certainly lead to either job satisfaction or retention.

**Age:** Demographic characteristics of employees are some of the crucial variables when considering employees retention, although, some studies have found inconsistent results on this aspect (Katoch, 2012). According to Khan *et al.* (2013) in an organisational context, age is referred to the span of life which the person spends in the organisation. Karsh *et al.* (2005), indicated that employees age tends to be negatively associated with their intention to leave the organisation because of financial commitments to their families. On the same vein Karsh *et al.* (2005) further stated that younger employees are the ones who are prone to leave the organisation as compared to older ones, solely because most of them have routine jobs and are less involved in the decision making. Given this background it is therefore important to further explore whether employees of different age cohorts significantly differ in their intention to quit the job after the organisation have invested in them with training.

**Relationship between age and employee retention:** Ahuja *et al.* (2007) revealed that there is a relationship between employee's intentions to stay in the organisation with regard to the level of development and age. Rehman (2012) also posits that in most instances younger

employees have high intentions to leave their organisations, since, they have low family responsibilities and they have nothing to lose when they exit. However, in a study conducted in the public sector organisations in Pakistan, it was revealed that there is a significant relationship between employee's age and their intentions to leave the organisation (Rehman, 2012). On the other hand, a negative relationship was found between age and employees intention to leave the organisation (Kabungaidze *et al.*, 2013).

**Problem statement:** For an organisation to remain competitive and profitable, employees are the most valuable resources. However, retaining a skilled workforce has become a major concern and challenge for many organisations, particularly within South Africa (Arthur, 2001; Muteswa and Ortlepp, 2011; Terera and Ngirande, 2014). Due to such a challenge organisations are striving to impede turnover yet increasing retention of its valuable employees in an attempt to enhance the organisational success (Erasmus *et al.*, 2015). From a global perspective several studies were conducted on the influence of training and employee retention in public, private and academic institutions (Ahmad and Bakar, 2011; Hassan *et al.*, 2013; Chen, 2014). In the South African context, studies in this area were concentrating mostly on private and non-academic sectors (Terera and Ngirande, 2014; Nkosi, 2015). Therefore, very few information is known from the literature regarding training as determinant of employee retention in higher education institutions in South Africa, more specifically on previously black disadvantaged rural institutions of higher learning. In addition, there seem to be also a dearth of knowledge on whether training can be a determinant of retention among academics of different age groups. Therefore, it is imperative to carry out a study of this nature in order to investigate whether training has an influence on employee retention among academics at a rural South African higher education institution.

**Objectives of the study:** The study is guided by the following objectives:

- To determine if there is any relationship between training and employee retention
- To check whether there is a significant mean difference between employee's age groups and their intention to leave the organisation

**Research hypotheses:**

- H<sub>1</sub>: there is a relationship between training and employee retention
- H<sub>2</sub>: there is a significant mean difference between employee's age groups and their intention to leave the organisation

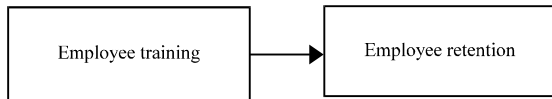


Fig. 1: Conceptual model for the relationship between employee training and employee retention

**Conceptual model:** In light of the aforementioned problem statement, literature review and research objectives, Fig. 1 demonstrates the conceptual model with regard to exploring whether there is a relationship between employee training and employee retention. Additionally to determine whether there is a mean significant difference in employee’s intentions to leave based on age groups.

**MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The study made use of the quantitative research approach. The target audience for this study was academic staff members at a selected higher learning institution in South Africa. The population consisted of approximately 350 members from different academic departments hence, stratified random sampling technique was used to select a sample of 129 employees.

**Data collection method:** A self administered questionnaire was used to solicit data from the participants. Three measuring instruments were used to compute the variables in this study. These were the biographical questionnaire which was used to obtain personal information of the participants, training questionnaire and the intention to leave questionnaire. For the measurement of training, questions were adopted from Training Effectiveness Questionnaire (TEQ). Questions were measured on a five point Likert scale, ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The reliability coefficient of correlation Cronbach alpha for the instrument has been 0.82 in a previous study.

To measure employee retention, the intention to leave questionnaire by Cowin was used. Questions were also measured on a 5 point Likert scale. The alpha coefficient for this instrument has been 0.96 in a previous study by Terera and Ngirande (2014). In the present study both the training effectiveness and the intention to leave questionnaire were reliable as shown in the Table 1.

**Research procedure:** Permission was granted from the university research directorate and a covering letter accompanied the questionnaire which assured participants of their anonymity and confidentiality was provided.

Table 1: Internal consistency of the instruments

| Variables          | Number of items | Cronbach’s alpha |
|--------------------|-----------------|------------------|
| Training           | 11              | 0.927            |
| Intention to leave | 3               | 0.819            |

**Data analysis:** Descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages) were used to describe the demographic data in summary form. Pearson product moment correlation coefficient was used to specify the relationship between the independent and dependent variables (training and employee retention). Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was also used to find the significant mean differences between age groups with intentions remain in the organisation as a result of training.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

**Demographic information:** Table 2 depicts the characteristics of the participants in the study. A large number of participants 73 (56.6%) were males while females were 56 (43%). Results also shows that the majority of the respondents were ranging between the ages of 31-40 years 39 (30.2%) and the least 10 (7.8%) were between 61 years and above. Again, it is shown that most of the respondents were lecturers 73 (56.6%) while only 23 (17.8%) were junior lecturers. Majority of the participants possessed a post graduate degree 102 (79.1%) whereas only 1 (0.8%) respondent was a holder of a certificate. The study also revealed that majority of the participants 47 (36.4%) has been in the organisation for a period between 1-5 years while 23 (17.8%) of the participants have been in the organisation for a longer period of more than 10 years.

**The relationship between training and employee retention:** The first objective of this study was to determine the relationship between training and employee retention. The pearson-product moment correlations enabled the researchers to identify the direction and strength of the relationship between training and employee retention as depicted in Table 3.

Results in Table 3, revealed a statistically significant positive relationship between training and employee retention ( $r = 0.193$ ;  $p = 0.028$ ). This implies that as the provision of training is improved, the retention of employees is also increased. Hence, the presence or absence of training has an impact on employee retention. We therefore fail to accept  $H_0$  and conclude that there is a relationship between training and employee retention. In a study conducted by Litheko it was also reported that there is a positive relationship between training and employee retention.

Table 2: Demographic information

| Characteristics                           | Frequency (f) | Percentage (%) |
|---|---------------|----------------|
| <b>Gender</b>                             |               |                |
| Female                                    | 56            | 43.4           |
| Male                                      | 73            | 56.6           |
| <b>Age category (years)</b>               |               |                |
| 21-30                                     | 27            | 20.9           |
| 31-40                                     | 39            | 30.2           |
| 41-50                                     | 33            | 25.6           |
| 51-60                                     | 20            | 15.5           |
| 61 years and above                        | 10            | 7.8            |
| <b>Occupational level</b>                 |               |                |
| Junior lecturer                           | 23            | 17.8           |
| Lecturer                                  | 73            | 56.6           |
| Senior lecturer                           | 33            | 25.6           |
| <b>Highest professional qualification</b> |               |                |
| Certificate                               | 1             | 0.8            |
| Diploma                                   | 5             | 3.9            |
| Degree                                    | 21            | 16.3           |
| Post Graduate Degree                      | 102           | 79.1           |
| <b>Period of employment (years)</b>       |               |                |
| Less than a year                          | 20            | 15.5           |
| 1-5                                       | 47            | 36.4           |
| 6-10                                      | 39            | 30.2           |
| 10 years and above                        | 23            | 17.8           |

Table 3: Correlations between training and employee retention

| Item               | Mean   | SD      | 1      | 2 |
|--------------------|--------|---------|--------|---|
| Training           | 3.9626 | 0.46569 | -      |   |
| Employee retention | 3.0636 | 0.64609 | 0.028* | - |

\*Correlation is significant at 0.01 levels (2tailed); \*\*Correlation is significant at 0.05 levels (2 tailed)

Table 4: Significant mean differences between employee's age categories and their intention to leave

| ANOVA          | Sum of squares | df  | Mean squares | F-value | Sig.  |
|----------------|----------------|-----|--------------|---------|-------|
| Between groups | 0.802          | 4   | 0.201        | 0.922   | 0.453 |
| Within group   | 26.957         | 124 | 0.217        | -       | -     |
| Total          | 27.759         | 128 | -            | -       | -     |

**Significant mean differences between employees age categories and their intention to leave their organisation:**

To answer the second research objective of whether there is a significant mean difference between employee's age categories and their intention to leave their organisation, one-way analysis of variance test was carried out. Results in Table 4 indicated that there is no significant mean difference on employee's intention to leave their organisation on the basis of their age categories ( $F = 0.922$ ; Sig. = 0.453).

These findings are consistent with those by Omar *et al.* (2015) who reported that age does not necessarily explain a distinctive variation when considering employees intention to leave. On the other hand these results are contrary to the findings by Dyk and Coetzee (2012) whom in their study on retention factors in medical and information technology services reported that age groups differ significantly in their levels of retention. Therefore, from the results, we fail to reject  $H_0$  and conclude that there is no significant mean

difference between employees (academics) of different age groups and their intention to leave the organisation as a result of training.

**CONCLUSION**

The findings of this research study reveals that training has an influence on employee retention. It can thus be concluded that in order to retain valuable employees, higher education institutions can improve their retention strategy by regularly providing training opportunities to their employees.

**LIMITATIONS**

Several limitations were identified in this study. Firstly, the study only focused on one institution, hence, the results may not be generalisable to the entire academics in South Africa or to other occupational groups and industries. Secondly, the cross-sectional research design may serve as a limitation as it makes it difficult to determine causal inferences about the relationship between the two variables. Finally, the sample size was relatively small ( $n = 129$ ) and data were only collected within one institution of higher learning. This may have limited the generalisability of the findings.

Conversely, in light of the findings, conclusions and limitations of this particular study, a number of recommendations for future research may be made. A significant recommendation would be to use a larger sample size from different demographical regions to generalise the findings to the broader.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

South African context. Furthermore, the study recommends that further studies be undertaken, involving other occupational groups and industries to determine whether the relationship between employee training and employee retention remain the same in different sectors and occupational groups.

In addition, a longitudinal study could be employed to determine whether the relationship between employee training and employee retention remain stable across time. The final recommendation would be to determine whether additional factors such as gender and age moderate this relationship.

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