Talent Exodus and Staff Turnover in Nigerian Universities

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PANORAMIC VIEW

This chapter takes a critical look at the growing challenge of talent exodus in Nigerian universities and its impact on staff turnover. Amid ongoing crises—from economic hardship to insecurity and political instability—lecturers are leaving in search of better opportunities. While the trend offers some benefits like skill advancement and reduced competition, it leaves universities struggling to retain talent. The chapter calls for urgent reforms: improved pay, better working conditions, and youth-focused policies to keep the academic system stable and sustainable.

Introduction

The issue of staff turnover in the Nigerian education system presents a significant challenge with far-reaching implications for individuals and the government. Academic staff turnover, particularly among university lecturers, has become a focal point for educational administrators, policymakers, and other stakeholders. This phenomenon results in a loss of human capital despite the government's investment in training and professional development. Public funds are allocated to enhance university infrastructure and personnel development, but the resignation of trained academics for other employment opportunities undermines the sector's stability and effectiveness (Ajayi, 2015). Consequently, high turnover rates negatively impact the university system's core mandates—teaching, research, and public service.

A considerable number of Nigerian academics have migrated abroad over the past two decades, securing positions in universities and research centres in Europe, North America, and the Middle East. The ongoing wave of academic migration is largely attributed to poor working conditions, insufficient funding, and unfavourable policies affecting university governance (Tamuno, 2018). This trend has significantly weakened Nigeria's higher education system, affecting its ability to retain experienced lecturers and maintain academic standards.

The rapid rate of academic staff departures presents severe challenges to Nigerian universities. Brain drain is a persistent issue driven by inadequate funding, unstable governance, and unfavourable working conditions. Additionally, other systemic issues—including poor compensation, lack of research incentives, and limited opportunities for career advancement—further contribute to the rising trend of talent exodus. Researchers have observed that academic staff migration affects service quality, institutional reputation, and the sustainability of intellectual capital (Ajayi, Oyebisi, & Ogunjobi, 2017). The persistent exodus of academic staff from Nigerian universities has far-reaching consequences. Many lecturers seek employment opportunities in foreign institutions due to job insecurity, financial instability, and deteriorating working conditions. In some cases, academic staff leave pre-emptively, fearing layoffs, retrenchment, or unfavourable government policies affecting higher education. The loss of experienced academics diminishes the quality of instruction, disrupts research activities, and weakens institutional stability (Osasuli, 2016).

Among the primary reasons for this academic migration is the declining prestige and financial well-being of university lecturers. Historically, universities attracted top intellectuals

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due to competitive salaries, robust research support, and a conducive work environment. However, these incentives have significantly eroded. Key academic resources—such as well-equipped libraries, functional laboratories, and access to international research grants—have become scarce, further discouraging lecturers from remaining in the system (Sanda, 2014). Additionally, the increasing workload imposed on university staff, due to the rising student population without a corresponding increase in faculty, has led to burnout and job dissatisfaction.

High staff turnover rates create instability in the academic environment, affecting both students and the quality of research output. Retaining skilled academics is critical for the development of a sustainable higher education system. The failure to address these concerns will continue to push talented lecturers to seek employment in countries with better working conditions. Thus, a comprehensive strategy is necessary to mitigate the effects of talent exodus. This strategy should focus on improving remuneration packages, enhancing research funding, and fostering a more conducive academic environment. Without immediate intervention, the ongoing academic brain drain will continue to weaken Nigeria's university system, limiting its capacity to contribute meaningfully to national development (Ajayi, Oyebisi, & Ogunjobi, 2017).

Position Statement

This paper argues that faculty turnover in Nigerian universities is a national emergency that requires urgent and systemic intervention. The argument that faculty turnover is a global phenomenon is misleading. While academic mobility is expected in any competitive system, the scale at which Nigerian universities are losing faculty is unsustainable and far exceeds normal migration patterns. Unlike in developed countries, where mobility fosters knowledge exchange, in Nigeria, faculty migration is overwhelmingly one-directional, with little to no return of expertise. This creates a widening gap between Nigeria's universities and their global counterparts, deepening educational inequality and reducing the nation's intellectual capital.

Ignoring this crisis will have far-reaching consequences for national development. A weakened university system produces poorly trained graduates, reduces research innovation, and limits Nigeria's ability to compete in the global knowledge economy. The longer this issue remains unaddressed, the greater the economic and intellectual losses the country will suffer. The Nigerian government and university administrators must immediately implement strategic interventions to halt this mass departure of academic talent. Without urgent reforms—including competitive salaries, research funding, better working conditions, and institutional autonomy—Nigeria's higher education system will continue to decline, crippling the country's progress in science, technology, and innovation.

This paper asserts that reversing faculty turnover is a national imperative since a country without its brightest academic minds risks stalling in innovation, development, and the advancement of its education system, hindering its ability to compete globally. The survival of Nigeria's universities and the nation's future depend on the ability to retain its academic workforce.

Conceptual Clarification

Talent exodus is a phenomenon that can be examined from multiple perspectives. Derek (2018) defines it as the migration of skilled, experienced, and highly trained individuals from one institution or country to another within a specific time frame. Robbins (2014) describes it as the voluntary or involuntary departure of employees from an organisation, which can take the form of resignations, layoffs, retirements, or extended leaves of absence.

In the academic sector, this phenomenon is often referred to as brain drain, where highly skilled professionals seek better opportunities outside their home country due to unfavourable working conditions. A significant number of African academics, including

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Nigerian lecturers, have relocated to the United Kingdom, the United States, and other developed countries in pursuit of better career prospects (Ongowo, 2013). Brain drain in Nigerian universities is primarily driven by inadequate salaries, poor working conditions, and limited career advancement opportunities.

While some level of staff turnover is inevitable due to personal reasons such as illness, retirement, or family obligations, excessive turnover negatively impacts institutional productivity and reputation. The constant departure of experienced academics disrupts knowledge transfer, weakens mentorship structures, and increases recruitment and training costs for universities (Oyewole, 2012). Organisations, particularly educational institutions, are deeply concerned about employee retention because hiring and training replacements require significant time and financial investment.

The Nigerian higher education system has struggled with a persistent wave of academic migration over the past three decades. Factors such as economic instability, lack of research funding, and poor recognition of academic contributions have contributed to this trend. Baiys (2013) notes that the discontent among Nigerian university lecturers has steadily increased, pushing many of them to seek better opportunities abroad.

Factors Responsible for Talent Exodus in Nigerian Universities

The mass exodus of academic staff from Nigerian universities is not a random occurrence but the result of deep-rooted structural failures in the country's higher education system. Faculty turnover is driven by a combination of economic hardship, institutional neglect, excessive workload, and weak governance structures. These factors create a hostile academic environment, pushing highly skilled lecturers to seek better opportunities elsewhere. If these issues are not urgently addressed, Nigeria will continue to suffer from a crippling loss of intellectual capital, further weakening its universities and reducing their global competitiveness.

Poor Compensation and Economic Hardships: The issue of poor compensation remains one of the most critical factors driving staff turnover in Nigerian universities. Despite the demanding nature of academic work, lecturers are grossly underpaid, earning salaries that are neither competitive nor reflective of their qualifications and contributions. A senior lecturer in Nigeria earns less than their counterparts in South Africa and those in the United States. This stark wage disparity is not just an economic inconvenience but a direct assault on the professional dignity of academics. The financial strain placed on lecturers forces many to seek alternative employment opportunities, whether in the private sector or foreign universities that offer better financial security. The study of Capel (2014) revealed that institutions with poor compensation packages experience a higher rate of talent exodus than those with good pay packages. Beyond the low salaries, the irregular payment of wages and allowances exacerbates economic hardships for Nigerian lecturers. Many faculty members experience months-long salary delays, making it difficult to meet personal financial obligations such as housing, healthcare, and education for their children. The situation is even worse for retired academics, many of whom struggle to access their pensions due to bureaucratic inefficiencies. Unlike in other countries where pension schemes for academics are structured and reliable, Nigeria's poor retirement benefits discourage long-term commitment to the profession. As a result, lecturers who foresee financial instability in their later years are more likely to leave early for countries that guarantee stable retirement plans.

The lack of performance-based incentives further compounds the issue. According to Williams (2017), poor compensation is one of the factors for staff turnover. A large proportion of employees leave organisations for better salary, better fringe benefits and better opportunity for upward growth, poor working environment conditions, harassment by managers and overwork (Justus, Kombo, Murumba & Edwin, 2011). Sinha and Shukla (2013) argue that one common cause of high employee turnover rates is low pay and benefits package. When a worker is employed in a low-wage position with limited benefits, there is little incentive to stay

if a similar employer offers even a slightly higher rate of pay (Sinha & Shukla, 2013). Vuyisile (2016) argues that the compensation strategy is extremely important as the right compensation strategy helps to build an effective and competitive organisation.

The lack of performance-based incentives further compounds the issue. In well-funded university systems, faculty members are rewarded for outstanding research, publications, and academic contributions through salary increments, research grants, and financial bonuses. In Nigeria, however, there is no structured reward system that recognises or compensates academic excellence. Lecturers are expected to conduct research, publish extensively, and contribute to national development without any corresponding financial incentives. This creates frustration among faculty members, who feel undervalued despite their intellectual contributions. Many opt to migrate to institutions that prioritise academic welfare and reward scholarly achievements appropriately. Economic instability within the country also plays a role in faculty migration. With inflation eroding the real value of salaries, lecturers find it increasingly difficult to maintain a reasonable standard of living. Rising costs of goods, poor healthcare services, and the depreciating value of the naira have made remaining in Nigeria a less attractive option. Without substantial salary adjustments, financial stability, and structured incentives, Nigeria will continue to lose its most qualified academics to institutions that offer better economic prospects and a more secure future. Silaban (2018) states that the higher the compensation received by employees, the lower the intention to leave employees, and conversely, the lower the compensation received by employees, the higher the intention to leave employees.

Poor Working Conditions and Institutional Neglect: The deteriorating working conditions in Nigerian universities are a major driver of talent exodus and staff turnover. Academic institutions are expected to provide an enabling environment for teaching, research, and innovation, yet Nigerian universities have increasingly failed to meet even the most basic standards. If working conditions are substandard or the workplace lacks important facilities such as proper lighting, furniture, restrooms and other health and safety provisions, employees will not be willing to put up with the inconveniences for a long time. (Justus, Kombo, Murumba & Edwin, 2011). Many campuses suffer from inadequate infrastructure, obsolete teaching facilities, unreliable electricity, and insufficient internet access, making it difficult for lecturers to perform their duties effectively. The absence of modern laboratories, well-equipped libraries, and conducive office spaces has left faculty members frustrated and demotivated, forcing them to seek employment in better-equipped institutions abroad.

The state of university facilities is deplorable. Many lecturers do not have designated office spaces, making student consultations and research work highly inconvenient. In science and engineering faculties, laboratory equipment is either outdated or completely nonfunctional, forcing lecturers to teach theoretically rather than practically. Libraries, which should be the intellectual backbone of any university, are often filled with obsolete textbooks, and faculty members struggle to access current research materials due to poor funding for journal subscriptions. Without access to up-to-date knowledge and functional research tools, lecturers find it impossible to conduct groundbreaking research, leading many to leave for institutions that provide the necessary resources for academic excellence. Suliman and Obaidli (2011) established a significant influence of working conditions on employee turnover. Besides infrastructure, institutional neglect manifests in the lack of administrative support and faculty welfare programmes. Many Nigerian universities lack structured mentorship programmes, professional development initiatives, or policies aimed at improving faculty well-being. In contrast, universities in developed countries provide career development programmes, access to research grants, and opportunities for academic collaboration, ensuring that faculty members remain engaged and productive. Nigerian lecturers, however, are left to navigate their careers without institutional support, often relying on personal connections to advance professionally. This absence of structured academic growth further contributes to dissatisfaction and the desire to relocate to institutions where faculty welfare is prioritised. A poor work environment may

cause discomfort to some employees, who may end up being attracted to other organisations with better working conditions. Oludeyi (2015) also averred that the work environment significantly affects employees in an organisation, hence their decision to stay with the organisation.

The general neglect of academic staff is also evident in poor maintenance of campus infrastructure and a lack of investment in modernising teaching methods. Many classrooms remain overcrowded, air conditioning and ventilation are poor, and in some cases, lecturers must bring personal laptops, projectors, or even generators to facilitate their lectures. The absence of a well-maintained learning environment diminishes the prestige of the teaching profession and erodes faculty morale. Until universities prioritise faculty welfare and improve working conditions, they will continue to lose their best minds to institutions that offer better infrastructure, stronger administrative support, and a culture of academic excellence.

Excessive Workload and Faculty Burnout: The overwhelming workload imposed on academic staff in Nigerian universities is another contributor to talent exodus and staff turnover. As universities face chronic understaffing, lecturers are burdened with excessive teaching responsibilities, administrative duties, and research expectations, often without the necessary institutional support. The result is an unsustainable work environment where faculty members struggle to balance their roles effectively, leading to widespread burnout and a decline in overall job satisfaction. It was discovered by Akinmayowa and Kadiri (2014) in their study that academic employees were highly stressed by a variety of factors, including their workload, research, and professional growth, as well as administrative concerns. An increased stress level may likely affect lecturers' effectiveness in performing their job and result in them rushing over job tasks by not necessarily doing them well. In most cases, the student-to-lecturer ratio is alarmingly high, far exceeding global standards. While countries with strong academic systems maintain a ratio of around 16:1, Nigerian universities often operate with ratios as high as 50:1, placing an undue strain on lecturers who are expected to manage large classes with minimal resources. The sheer volume of students under their supervision limits meaningful engagement, reducing the quality of mentorship and instruction. Furthermore, Osaat and Ekechukwu (2017) submitted that lecturers' workload influenced their performance. The cited study concluded that excessive workload led to stress, which aggravated and caused physical and emotional exhaustion, lack of concentration, frustration, diminished effectiveness, lateness or absenteeism from class, anxiety and depression, among others.

Administrative responsibilities further compound the problem. Many lecturers are expected to take on roles that should be managed by dedicated university administrators, including curriculum planning, student affairs, and accreditation processes. This additional burden detracts from their primary responsibilities and exacerbates the stress associated with their roles. The absence of institutional mechanisms to support faculty well-being means that many lecturers are left to navigate these challenges alone, leading to chronic stress, fatigue, and eventual disengagement from their work. Other studies have discovered a strong negative relationship between lecturers' workload and their productivity (Amini-Philips & Okonmah, 2020; Shah et al., 2011). This evidence implies that an increase in workload allocated to staff is connected to a decline in their job performance and vice versa. Over time, the relentless demands placed on faculty members erode their motivation, pushing them to seek opportunities in institutions where academic work is more structured and adequately supported. Until Nigerian universities address this unsustainable workload, burnout will continue to drive faculty turnover, weakening the nation's higher education system and further diminishing its global standing. On the contrary, some studies have concluded that stress resulting from the workload of lecturers positively influenced their teaching and research effectiveness to a significant extent (Larestan, 2020; Usoro & Etuk, 2016). A high amount of workload led to a higher degree of job performance among lecturers.

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Underfunding of Universities

The chronic underfunding of Nigerian universities also contributes to staff turnover and academic brain drain. Despite the critical role that higher education plays in national development, successive governments have consistently failed to allocate sufficient financial resources to the sector (CUPA-HR, 2023). The result is a university system that struggles with inadequate infrastructure, insufficient research funding, delayed salaries, and an overall lack of institutional support for academic staff. Unlike developed nations where higher education receives substantial budgetary allocations, Nigerian universities are forced to operate within severe financial constraints, making it nearly impossible to attract and retain top faculty members.

One of the most visible consequences of underfunding is the deterioration of university infrastructure. Many academic institutions lack modern lecture halls, well-equipped laboratories, and functional libraries, forcing lecturers to work in conditions that do not support effective teaching or research. Science and engineering faculties, which rely heavily on practical experimentation, are particularly affected, as many universities lack the necessary equipment and materials for students to gain hands-on experience. This makes academic work frustrating and uninspiring for faculty members, many of whom are left with no choice but to seek opportunities in countries where research facilities are world-class and adequately funded. This was supported by McClure (2024), who identified underfunding as one of the causes of university staff turnover.

Another major consequence of underfunding is the inability of universities to pay competitive salaries and benefits. Many lecturers face salary delays, while others receive wages that do not reflect their qualifications or experience. This financial insecurity contributes to job dissatisfaction and serves as a strong push factor for faculty members seeking stability abroad (Times Higher Education, 2024). Without urgent intervention to increase university funding, Nigeria will continue to experience a mass exodus of academics, further weakening its higher education system and reducing its ability to compete globally.

Inconsistent and Unreliable Policy Implementation

The persistent inconsistency and unreliability of policy implementation in Nigeria's higher education sector have significantly contributed to faculty turnover. Universities thrive on stability, long-term planning, and well-structured policies that ensure sustainable growth. However, successive Nigerian governments have demonstrated a pattern of introducing education reforms that are either poorly implemented, inadequately funded, or completely abandoned due to political transitions. Ogunode and Adah (2020) observe that the obvious policy inconsistency is a factor preventing the smooth and effective implementation of educational policies and school programmes for the achievement of goals and objectives. The absence of a coherent and enforceable policy framework has created an environment of uncertainty, leaving many academics with no choice but to migrate to countries with structured and predictable academic systems.

The most glaring example of policy failure is the repeated failure of the Nigerian government to honour agreements with the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU). Over the years, ASUU has engaged in multiple industrial actions to demand better salaries, improved working conditions, and increased research funding. The 2009 Federal Government-ASUU Agreement, which outlined salary adjustments, infrastructure improvements, and research funding commitments, remains largely unimplemented more than a decade later. The failure to fulfil these promises has led to frequent and prolonged strikes, disrupting academic calendars and eroding trust between faculty members and the government. Many lecturers, frustrated by the endless cycle of negotiation, agreement, and non-implementation, have chosen to leave the system entirely in search of stability. Terhemba, Jacob and Ahaotu (2021)

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have argued that management of education has been ineffective due to poor implementation of policies, largely caused by policy instability.

Beyond ASUU agreements, other policy initiatives aimed at improving faculty welfare and university funding have suffered similar fates. The Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund) was established to provide research grants and infrastructure development for universities. While it has made some impact, bureaucratic inefficiencies, delays in fund disbursement, and allegations of mismanagement have prevented many faculty members from benefiting from its programmes. Research grants, which should be accessible to qualified academics, are often caught in layers of administrative bottlenecks, discouraging scholars from pursuing groundbreaking research within Nigeria.

According to Eru, Ogi and Ikpe (2019), after several revisions of the National Policy on Education, none of the editions of the National Policy on Education has adequately addressed the problem facing the educational operations in the country. Frequent changes in education policies with each new administration also contribute to staff turnover. Instead of building on existing frameworks, successive governments often introduce new policies that either contradict or render previous ones obsolete. This lack of continuity affects everything from faculty promotion structures to university funding mechanisms, making long-term academic planning impossible. In contrast, countries with well-established higher education policies—such as the United States, Canada, and Germany—maintain stable academic frameworks that allow universities to function independently of political instability. Nigerian academics, aware of this stark difference, are increasingly opting to relocate to countries where policies are predictable, reliable, and consistently enforced. The failure to implement structured, enforceable, and well-funded policies has left Nigerian universities in a state of perpetual crisis. Faculty members cannot plan their careers with confidence, research remains underfunded, and infrastructure projects often stall before completion. Without a clear and reliable commitment to higher education reforms, Nigeria will continue to lose its best academics to institutions that offer stability, structured career growth, and a well-defined policy framework that supports faculty development. Little wonder then, Lawal (2020) in his research found that despite the great potential evident in the educational enterprise, these haphazard and short-term approaches to the formulation and implementation of policies have only moved our educational system from a promising to a warped and tumultuous one.

Political Interference and Weak Institutional Autonomy

The erosion of institutional autonomy in Nigerian universities due to persistent political interference has significantly contributed to faculty turnover. Universities, by design, should operate as independent centres of knowledge production, free from political manipulation and external control. However, the Nigerian higher education system remains highly politicised, with government influence extending into faculty recruitment, promotions, research funding, and administrative decision-making. (Udida, 2009) Noted that some individuals appointed as vice-chancellors of some universities are weak, not competent and lack administrative potential. This persistent interference undermines academic freedom, disrupts institutional stability, and fosters a climate of uncertainty that compels many lecturers to seek opportunities in more autonomous academic environments abroad. According to Schmidt (2006), presidents and governors often handpick vice-chancellors to bring public universities under partisan control. In contrast, universities in countries with strong academic governance structures operate with clear, merit-based leadership selection processes, ensuring that institutional decisions are made in the best interest of academia rather than political expediency.

Government interference is also evident in faculty recruitment and promotion processes, where appointments and career advancements are often delayed or obstructed by bureaucratic bottlenecks. Elujekwute (2019) stated that vice-chancellors are appointed by the

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President/governor to erode public universities' autonomy, academic freedom and undue political interference in the management of the public universities, thereby lowering productivity and academic standards. In many instances, political actors influence hiring decisions, sidelining more qualified candidates in favour of individuals with political affiliations. This undermines morale among lecturers who see their career progression hindered by factors unrelated to academic excellence. Unlike in developed countries, where universities exercise full control over faculty hiring and promotions, Nigerian institutions are often subject to external approval from government agencies, creating inefficiencies and fostering widespread dissatisfaction among academics. Political interference in tertiary institutions in Nigeria has led to poor governance and ineffective leadership in many tertiary institutions across the country. Ogunode, Atobauka, & Ayoko (2023) and Okoli (2016b, 2016a) argue that in an era where many key university appointments and decisions are made outside the university, meritocracy is eroded and replaced with nepotism, godfatherism, lobbying and political patronage. This usually results in a system where the most eligible persons are often frustrated and left without promotions (Assie-Lumumba, 2005). Ogunode & Omenuko (2021) observed that political influences are a major problem hindering the effective planning of university education in Nigeria.

Impacts of Talent Exodus on Nigerian Universities

The mass departure of academics from Nigerian universities has had profound implications for higher education quality, institutional stability, and national development. Ogbu, (2019).The literature identifies several key consequences, including a decline in teaching standards, reduced research output, and disruptions to institutional governance.

Decline in Teaching Quality and Student Learning Outcomes: The continuous exodus of faculty members from Nigerian universities has significantly weakened the quality of teaching and student learning outcomes. A university's primary function is to provide high-quality education, mentorship, and knowledge transfer, but as experienced lecturers leave, the ability to fulfil this mission becomes increasingly compromised. The shortage of qualified faculty members has led to overcrowded classrooms, reduced student engagement, and a decline in the overall academic experience. Ogunode and Ishaya (2021) also averred the negative impact of talent exodus on teaching and learning in Nigerian universities. The long-term consequence is the graduation of students who are not adequately prepared for the demands of the workforce or further academic pursuits, ultimately weakening the nation's intellectual and professional capacity.

The loss of experienced faculty members also disrupts curriculum continuity. Lecturers who leave often take with them years of expertise and specialised knowledge that cannot be easily replaced. As a result, universities are forced to rely on adjunct faculty, part-time lecturers, or overburdened junior academics who may not have the same level of experience or research background. This inconsistency in teaching faculty affects the depth and continuity of course delivery, causing syllabus gaps, outdated course content, and a fragmented learning experience. In technical and research-intensive fields such as medicine, engineering, and applied sciences, this lack of continuity can have serious implications, as students may graduate with theoretical knowledge but little practical experience due to inadequate supervision and mentorship.

Moreover, the increased dependence on underqualified or temporary teaching staff weakens academic rigour. In a bid to fill vacancies, universities frequently resort to hiring lecturers who may lack teaching experience, research expertise, or familiarity with the institutional curriculum. This leads to inconsistent assessment methods, a lack of academic standardisation, and a decline in overall educational quality. (Emeghara, 2013). The decline in teaching quality ultimately affects student learning outcomes and career preparedness. Employers increasingly report that Nigerian graduates lack critical thinking skills, research

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abilities, and practical problem-solving experience, making them less competitive in both local and international job markets. As faculty turnover continues to destabilise academic institutions, the long-term impact will be an entire generation of graduates who are academically weaker, professionally underprepared, and unable to drive innovation in their respective fields.

Weakening of Research and Innovation: The continuous exodus of faculty members from Nigerian universities has led to a significant decline in research productivity, particularly the disruption of ongoing research projects. Many lecturers who leave are principal investigators or key collaborators in university-led research initiatives. When they depart, their research is either abandoned or significantly delayed, particularly in fields that require long-term studies, laboratory experiments, and interdisciplinary collaboration. Unlike in well-funded academic environments where research continuity is prioritised, Nigerian universities lack the institutional structures to ensure that projects continue seamlessly after a faculty member's departure. As a result, many promising research endeavours are left incomplete, further reducing Nigeria's academic impact on the global stage (Madubuko and Nwaka 2024). Similarly, the loss of faculty members has led to a significant decline in research publications from Nigerian universities. High-quality academic output requires consistent mentorship, access to resources, and a supportive institutional environment—all of which are undermined by faculty turnover. In many cases, departing lecturers take their expertise to institutions abroad, where they publish under foreign affiliations, further decreasing the visibility of Nigerian universities in global academic databases. Countries that have successfully developed their research sectors, such as China and India, have done so by investing in faculty retention, expanding research funding, and providing structured career advancement opportunities. Without similar reforms, Nigerian universities will remain marginal players in international academic discourse.

Institutional Instability and Leadership Gaps: The ongoing exodus of faculty members from Nigerian universities has significantly contributed to institutional instability and leadership deficiencies, disrupting the governance and strategic direction of higher education institutions. Universities rely on experienced faculty members to provide academic leadership, guide institutional policies, and mentor the next generation of scholars. However, as these key individuals leave, the system becomes fragmented, disorganised, and unable to function effectively. Akporehe (2022) described this issue as a disturbing phenomenon that is affecting institutional stability. The departure of senior academics weakens institutional structures, disrupts policy continuity, and reduces the effectiveness of administrative decision-making, leaving universities vulnerable to mismanagement and stagnation.

Leadership instability is further compounded by the politicisation of university governance, where appointments for key administrative positions, such as Vice-Chancellors and deans, are often influenced by political interests rather than academic merit. With the departure of experienced faculty members, universities become even more susceptible to external interference, weakening their autonomy and reducing their ability to make decisions in the best interest of academic development. In contrast, institutions in countries like Germany, Canada, and the United Kingdom maintain strong leadership structures that allow universities to function independently of government influence, ensuring policy consistency and strategic continuity. The shortage of experienced faculty members also creates leadership vacuums in critical academic and administrative positions. Many senior academics serve as heads of departments, research directors, and mentors for junior faculty members. As they leave, there are often no qualified replacements to fill these leadership roles, leading to inefficiencies in faculty administration, disorganised research programmes, and weakened departmental coordination. The result is a university system that lacks strong leadership, making it difficult to attract funding, maintain academic excellence, or implement meaningful institutional reforms.

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Prospects of Talent Exodus

While the issue of talent exodus in Nigerian universities is widely acknowledged as a crisis, some opposing viewpoints suggest that it is not as detrimental as claimed. These perspectives argue that faculty migration is a natural occurrence, that universities can function with part-time and adjunct staff, and that financial constraints limit the possibility of increasing academic salaries and funding. Some of the prospects of talent exodus identified include:

Employment Opportunities for New Academics: While the exodus of experienced faculty members from Nigerian universities presents numerous challenges, it also creates opportunities for new and early-career academics to enter the system. Batista, Lacuesta, and Vicente (2016), while discussing the brain gain hypothesis, revealed a sizeable positive impact of talent exodus on educational attainment. Testing the 'brain gain' hypothesis as senior lecturers, professors, and research experts leave for better opportunities abroad, vacancies open up within universities, allowing younger scholars to take on academic roles that might have otherwise been unavailable. Imiera (2024) affirmed that talent exodus can serve as a gateway for a new generation of academics to gain employment, advance their careers, and introduce fresh perspectives into the Nigerian higher education system. This allows universities to inject new energy into teaching and research, as younger faculty members bring contemporary knowledge, emerging research interests, and innovative teaching methodologies into their fields. The above is one of the prospects of talent exodus, as averred by Crush and Frayne (2018), that migration should not always be viewed from a negative point, as there is a confirmed positive relationship between talent exodus and development.

Acquisition of Advanced Skills and Knowledge: The migration of Nigerian academics to foreign institutions also presents an opportunity for the acquisition of advanced skills, knowledge, and research expertise that can benefit the country in the long run. According to Kamoche (2018), in his study on contemporary developments in the management of human resources in Africa, there is every possibility of benefiting positively from the talent exodus. Many of the faculty members who leave Nigeria for universities in North America, Europe, and Asia gain exposure to cutting-edge research methodologies, innovative teaching techniques, and access to world-class facilities that are often lacking in Nigerian institutions. If properly harnessed, this experience can catalyse academic and institutional development, provided that returning scholars are given the necessary support to reintegrate and apply their expertise within Nigeria's higher education system.

If returning scholars are given the right incentives, they can transfer this knowledge to their home institutions, helping to modernise Nigeria's research landscape and improve the quality of academic output.

Reduced Population Pressure on Universities

The exodus of faculty members from Nigerian universities presents an unintended benefit of a temporary reduction in population pressure on overstretched academic institutions. Nigerian universities have long struggled with overcrowding, with student enrolments far exceeding institutional capacity. The departure of faculty members sometimes leads to fewer course offerings and enrolment restrictions, thereby reducing the number of students admitted into certain programmes. This, in turn, allows universities to better manage their existing resources, allocate available faculty more effectively, and slightly improve learning conditions for the students who remain. The above-mentioned point affirms another way of turning brain drain into brain gain as revealed by The South African Network of Skills Abroad (SANSA, 2018). Another impact of reduced population pressure is a slight improvement in student-to-lecturer ratios, though this effect is often marginal due to Nigeria's already severe staffing shortages. In some cases, as faculty members leave, universities are forced to limit class sizes or restructure departments, which may result in a

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more manageable distribution of students among available faculty members. However, this benefit is often short-lived, as universities continue to admit more students without addressing the underlying issue of faculty shortages. Without a strategic faculty recruitment plan, any temporary relief in student-to-lecturer ratios is quickly erased as universities continue to expand without proportional increases in academic staffing. Additionally, reduced enrolment in certain faculties can allow universities to redirect resources toward infrastructure improvements and curriculum restructuring. With fewer students in some programmes, there may be an opportunity to upgrade facilities, enhance teaching methods, and improve administrative efficiency. However, these benefits can only be realised if universities actively invest in strengthening their academic structures rather than merely adjusting to the constraints imposed by faculty turnover.

Conclusion

The exodus of academic talent from Nigerian universities presents one of the greatest challenges to the country's higher education system. Faculty turnover has led to a decline in teaching quality, reduced research output, weakened institutional stability, and a diminishing global presence in academic discourse. The loss of experienced lecturers not only disrupts the continuity of academic programmes but also limits mentorship opportunities for students, resulting in graduates who are less prepared for the demands of an evolving global workforce. Furthermore, the absence of a strong research culture, caused by faculty migration, stifles innovation, leaving Nigeria increasingly dependent on foreign technological and scientific advancements.

While there are some short-term benefits, such as employment opportunities for new academics, exposure to advanced research environments, and temporary reductions in student overcrowding, these advantages are overshadowed by the long-term damage caused by brain drain. Countries that have successfully mitigated faculty turnover, such as China, India, and South Korea, have done so through deliberate policy interventions, including competitive salaries, research funding, faculty reintegration programmes, and institutional autonomy. Nigeria must follow suit if it is to reverse this crisis.

The government and university administrators must take immediate and sustained action to address the root causes of faculty turnover. This includes improving faculty remuneration, increasing research funding, enhancing working conditions, reducing political interference, and establishing clear career progression pathways. Additionally, implementing programmes that encourage returning scholars to reintegrate into the Nigerian university system can help convert brain drain into brain gain. The future of Nigeria's higher education system depends on its ability to retain, support, and empower its academic workforce. Without urgent reforms, faculty migration will continue to weaken the country's intellectual capital, making it increasingly difficult for Nigerian universities to compete globally or contribute meaningfully to national development.

Suggestions

To mitigate the effects of faculty turnover and restore the stability of Nigeria's higher education system, a comprehensive, evidence-based approach is required. The government, university administrators, and relevant stakeholders must take immediate and strategic action to improve faculty retention and strengthen institutional capacity. The following recommendations are essential to reversing the brain drain crisis:

1. **Improve Faculty Compensation and Incentives:** The government must implement competitive salary structures that reflect the value of academic work. Regular salary reviews, performance-based incentives, housing benefits, and research allowances should be introduced to make academic careers financially viable and attractive. Ensuring timely salary payments and introducing pension security measures will provide stability, motivating

lecturers to remain within Nigerian universities rather than seeking better opportunities abroad.

2. **Increase Research Funding and Infrastructure Development:** Universities require adequate funding for research, modern laboratories, and access to international journals to compete globally. The government should expand the budget for higher education, while institutions should actively seek international research collaborations and private-sector partnerships to improve funding sources. Well-equipped research facilities, reliable internet access, and state-of-the-art academic resources will enhance productivity, ensuring Nigerian scholars can conduct meaningful, globally competitive research.
3. **Strengthen Institutional Autonomy and Reduce Political Interference:** Universities must operate independently of government influence, particularly in areas such as faculty recruitment, promotions, and funding allocations. Ensuring that leadership appointments are based on merit rather than political considerations will improve governance and enhance academic stability. By reducing external interference, universities can make strategic, long-term decisions that prioritise academic excellence, research advancement, and institutional growth, fostering a system built on professionalism rather than political patronage.
4. **Develop Structured Faculty Retention and Career Progression Policies:** Establishing clear and transparent promotion processes will provide faculty members with structured career pathways. Universities should create mentorship programmes, leadership training, and opportunities for professional development to retain skilled academics and prepare future university leaders. Providing fair and merit-based opportunities for career advancement will reduce job dissatisfaction and prevent faculty members from leaving due to stagnation or lack of recognition for their contributions.
5. **Create Incentives for Returning Academics:** The Nigerian government should establish reintegration programmes for scholars in the diaspora, offering research grants, academic appointments, and tax incentives to encourage their return. A well-structured programme, modelled after China's Thousand Talents Plan, could help Nigeria convert brain drain into brain gain. Creating an environment that supports the reintegration of returning scholars will allow Nigeria to benefit from the expertise and global networks they have built abroad.
6. **Expand Faculty Recruitment and Reduce Workload:** Universities must increase faculty recruitment efforts to address staff shortages and excessive teaching loads. Hiring more lecturers, particularly in specialised fields, will improve work-life balance and allow faculty to dedicate more time to research and mentorship. Additionally, integrating technology-driven learning solutions, such as digital classrooms and online resources, can help ease the burden on academic staff and enhance teaching efficiency across various disciplines.
7. **Ensure Policy Consistency and Fulfilment of Agreements:** The government must honour agreements with academic unions and ensure long-term education policies remain consistent and legally binding. Successive governments should not abandon agreements made by their predecessors, as this leads to instability and faculty frustration. Implementing a structured policy continuity framework will ensure that university funding, salary structures, and faculty welfare programmes are protected from political changes, creating a stable academic environment.

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