



## **“I am considering leaving soon” – Turnover Intentions of Academic Librarians in Zimbabwe**

**Willard Nyamubarwa**

Great Zimbabwe University, Masvingo, Zimbabwe

---

**Abstract.** The interest to investigate the turnover intentions of academic librarians in Zimbabwe stems from the fact the labour market in Zimbabwe is characterized by high levels of employee turnover and increasing low levels job security. Academic libraries like any other employer have therefore found themselves wanting in providing adequate services including adequately remunerating their employees thus leaving the employees with no option but to look beyond their employers as a source of livelihood. An e-questionnaire was designed purposively targeting 65 academic librarians in 10 state owned and 3 private universities across Zimbabwe. Additional data was gathered by purposively sampling 6 senior librarians for interviews to triangulate the data gathered through the e-questionnaires. Salaries and conditions of service, job performance, career growth, work environment, job satisfaction, supervisory style, promotional opportunities, and employee commitment were identified as the factors shaping turnover intentions of academic librarians in Zimbabwe.

**Keywords:** employee turnover, turnover intentions, academic librarians, Zimbabwe

---

### **Introduction**

The deployment of stable, rare, valuable and difficult to imitate (Steen, 2009) human resources in an organization has always been regarded as a way of gaining and maintaining advantage over competitors (Armstrong, 2010; Blomme, et al., 2008). In fact, human resources are viewed as key in developing and utilising other resources (land, capital & enterprise) in ways that create and sustain a competitive advantage to the organisation (Blomme, et al., 2008; Steen, 2009). It is against this observation that the concept of employee turnover carries with it negative connotations of management failure to motivate and retain employees. A huge

concern to most companies, employee turnover is a costly expense especially in lower paying job roles, for which the employee turnover rate is highest (Samuel & Chipunza, 2009) . As Brown, et al., (2009) observes, many organizations today strive to minimize employee turnover because such turnover is often associated with decreased organisational productivity and the associated cost of recruiting, inducting and training replacement employees. Hillmer, et al. (2004) supports this view by observing that the costs of hiring, inducting and supervising a replacement worker, can amount to 70% of his annual salary. In addition, employee turnover can also bring about a loss of organizational knowledge and history as experienced and knowledgeable employees leave the organization for competitors (Moyinhan & Pandey, 2008).

Given the potential negative implications of employee turnover on organizational success, Human Resource (HR) practitioners in many organizations have become preoccupied with crafting sound employee retention strategies (Armstrong, 2010). As research has proven, while it is imperative for organisations to attract quality employees to the organization, it is equally important for managers to devise strategies with which to retain the talented employees in organizations in order for the organization to harness the investments made in them (Samuel & Chipunza, 2009; Chiboiwa, et al., 2010; Ng'ete, et al., 2012). Steen (2009) concurs and argue that organizations that are unable to hire and retain highly skilled staff will hinder the development of organizational HR competencies and the resultant competitive advantage.

Intention to leave is according to Mobley (1982) is considered as part of a sequence in the psychological withdrawal of an employee from the job process. Scholars have argued that generally most employers do not pay serious attention to this concept, but rather with dealing with the actual turnover; which is a manifestation of the intention to leave (Samuel & Chipunza, 2009). In addition, it is difficult to gain access to people who have already left to determine why they really quit, thus making the study of intention to quit more appropriate than actual turnover, lastly employees who are thinking of quitting may still be persuaded to stay yet it is too

late to change the work environment for those who have already left employment (Lambert & Hogan, 2009; Mitchell, et al., 2001). For this study, 'intention to leave' refers to the subjective estimation of an individual's probability of leaving an organisation in the near future.

The global economic meltdown affecting the world in recent times has not spared African academic institutions. As Ng'ete, et al., (2012) observes, a study by the African Association of Universities (AAU) established that libraries in Africa have remained neglected and that universities have witnessed a lot of changes as a result of the changing economic climate and government policies. Zimbabwe particularly is still smarting from the effects of the decade long economic recession which has left many sectors of the economy, academic libraries included struggling to stay afloat in the turbulent Zimbabwean economy. Notwithstanding this, Zimbabwe boasts of 13 university and 15 polytechnic and teacher college libraries. These libraries are spread across the length and breadth of the country and cover a number of disciplines as dictated by their parent institutions.

The interest to investigate the turnover intentions of academic librarians in Zimbabwe stems from the fact the labour market in Zimbabwe is characterized by high levels of employee turnover and increasing low levels job security. Academic libraries like any other employer have therefore found themselves wanting in providing adequate services including adequately remunerating their employees thus leaving the employees with no option but to look beyond their employers as a source of livelihood.

According to scholars, (Chiboiwa, et al., 2010; Lambert & Hogan, 2009) it is prudent to study turnover intention of employees and take remedial action in time instead of addressing it after the employees have already left the organization. From the employer's perspective, once an employee has quit, there is little the employer can do except assume the expense of hiring and training another employee. Therefore, while it is imperative for academic libraries in Zimbabwe to initiate strategies that will stem the rate of turnover, it is more important to study and understand their

employee turnover intentions which precedes the actual turnover and take corrective if need be.

The broad objective of this study is to establish the turnover intentions of academic librarians in Zimbabwe. This objective can be established by:

1. Identifying the causes of employee turnover in Zimbabwean academic libraries.
2. Identifying the push and pull factors in the turnover intentions of academic libraries in Zimbabwe.

### **Review of literature**

Employee turnover refers to the rate of movement of employees in and out of an organization, normally (Armstrong, 2010). Salaries and conditions of service, job performance, career growth, work environment, job satisfaction, supervisory style, promotional opportunities, employee commitment and many other factors all play a significant role in shaping employee turnover (Hillmer, et al., 2004; Mobley, 1982). As such employee turnover is the outcome of a number of push and pull factors that come into the play during the course of the employment relationship. As Jafari (2011) observes, “in the turnover process everyone usually points out one factor for their turnover choice, but there are always more factors on the back hand that works as push-cart or driving force for that factor”.

Research by Moyinhan & Pandey (2008) has revealed that this multiplicity of factors that influence turnover intentions in organisations can be categorised into three distinct categories:

- 1) External environmental factors - to the effect of economic conditions on driving and shaping employee turnover across the labour industry.
- 2) Individual factors – Employee specific factors that shape turnover decisions. Examples include age, length of service with the organization, gender, race, family responsibilities, education, personality, and other personal considerations.

- 3) **Organizational factors** - These refers to organisational policies and practices such as opportunities for progress, supportive management, supportive HR policies, organisational culture and other factors

Callier (2011) identifies an additional facet of the work environment that influences employee turnover intentions, participation. Participation is a process in which decision-making is shared among individuals who are not generally considered to have equal status in the organisation (Wagner, 1995; Callier, 2011). As a result of the recent eminence of participation in modern day management discourse, organizations are choosing to implement participation practices on the assumption that it can impact employee motivation in ways that can reduce employee turnover (Kim, 2005; Callier, 2011; Wagner, 1995). It therefore follows from the above arguments that employee participation is one critical factor that can influence employee turnover intentions.

Nature of leadership influences the individuals' intention to leave or stay in the organisation (Brown, et al., 2009; Gwavuya, 2011). A poor relationship with the management can be an important reason for the employees to leave their jobs. As the Herzberg (1966) theory in Mbah & Ikemefuna (2011) views, strict employee supervision is an extrinsic factor and a "dissatisfier" as well as a "demotivator". A supervisor's positive attitude toward subordinate employees improves the employee attitudes toward work, their leader, and the organization. In turn, the employees develop intrinsic motivation and a good match between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation results in job satisfaction and a stronger propensity to stay with the employer (Ng'ete, et al., 2012; Brown, et al., 2009). A study by Gwavuya (2011) particularly affirms that incompetent leadership results in poor performance, high levels of stress, low commitment, low job satisfaction and high turnover intentions. The study also proved that leadership in organisations plays a significant role in employee motivation and retention especially if the employees "receive regular positive feedback and recognition".

Job satisfaction which is factor of quality management in organisations is yet another critical factor in shaping employee turnover intentions (Liden & Maslyn, 1994). As noted by Callier (2011) in the United States alone 77% of employees are unhappy with their current jobs and are considering leaving better alternatives. Numerous research results show that job satisfaction is found to be significantly and negatively related to turnover intentions on a consistent basis (Balfour & Neff, 1993; Callier, 2011; Liden & Maslyn, 1994). As noted above, a poor relationship between leaders and subordinates can cause employees to lose commitment and satisfaction with their jobs (Balfour & Neff, 1993; Morrow, et al., 2005). In fact according to Morrow, et al. (2005), the number one reason people quit is that they are treated poorly by their bosses. Those who remain in their jobs, working for poor bosses, have lower job satisfaction, lower commitment, psychological distress and subsequently high turnover intentions (Callier, 2011; Balfour & Neff, 1993; Morrow, et al., 2005).

Closely tied the concept of commitment is the influence of employee-organisation fit in shaping turnover intentions. Research has revealed that the extent to which employees identify themselves with their organization has a positive impact on their level of satisfaction and thereby their organizational attachment and intention to stay (Wagner, 1995; Blomme, et al., 2008). The fit between an employee's values and the values of the organization might provide the employees with a certain degree of comfort and identification with the organisation thereby minimizing stress and the desire to leave (Zeffane, 1994; Hrebiniak & Alutto, 1992). A wide gap between an employee's and the organization's values will on the other hand leave employees pondering their future in the organisation (Blomme, et al., 2008)

Rewards has also been cited by many scholars as a strong predictor of employee retention and turnover intentions (Armstrong, 2010; Gwavuya, 2011; Hillmer, et al., 2004). As scholars argue (Hillmer, et al., 2004; Samuel & Chipunza, 2009; Mobley, 1982), money is a motivating factor for employees in organisations and serves as a basis upon which individual employees assess the value their employer places on them. A study by Bergmann, et al. (1994) revealed that a well-designed employee

rewards package is an effective tool in attracting and motivating employees to stay. Employees whose salaries fall short of the prevailing salaries on the market may feel undervalued by their current employers and may end up looking for an employer that will pay them what they feel they're worth. This observation is further buttressed by Chiboiwa, et al., (2010) and (Samuel & Chipunza, (2009) whose researches revealed that there is a negative relationship between high rewards and turnover in organisations.

Internal rewards equity has also been identified by scholars as a push factor in employee turnover intentions. As Blomme, et al. (2008) puts it “When two or more employees perform similar work and have similar responsibilities, differences in pay rate can drive lower paid employees to quit”.

The work environment has also been identified by many scholars as a key factor is shaping turnover intentions in organisations (Mitchell, et al., 2001). The work environment refers to both the physical space surrounding the employee during his day to day duties as well as the psychological space associated with the work. A stressful (ergonomically) work setting has often been cited as a major of employees from the organisation (Jafari, 2011; Mitchell, et al., 2001). Hence employees tend to avoid workplaces that are tiring, poorly lit, hot and overtly unpleasant to work in. Additionally scholars have pointed to a breach in the psychological contract by the employer may result in the employees working in a psychological environment of mistrust, low job security and other psychological shocks. Rousseau (1989) in (Blomme, et al., 2008) suggests that a violation of the psychological contract may lead to strong emotional reactions such as anger, resentment and a sense of injustice. These psychological shocks have an effect of leaving employees pondering their future in the organisation and therefore considering leaving (Blomme, et al., 2008; Mitchell, et al., 2001).

Career growth is a key ingredient is shaping employee motivation, growth and commitment. As Lambert & Hogan (2009) observes, career progress creates stress on employee's perception of the worth of his career prospects in the organisation. A lack of career progress in organisations has therefore been cited as yet another

factor that influences employee turnover decisions. In organisation where there are clear career ladders and there are vast opportunities for career growth and opportunities, employees are likely to stay than in organisations where employee careers are static and there are no opportunities for career growth.

### **Materials and Methods**

In this study, “Academic Librarian” is defined as any professional employee working in Zimbabwean academic libraries. The study employed a descriptive survey design within the qualitative research paradigm to gather the research data. An e-questionnaire was designed purposively targeting 65 academic librarians in 10 state owned and 3 private universities across Zimbabwe. The questionnaire consisted of three sections. The first section covered demographics (library position, gender, salary, educational qualifications, experience, and marital status). The second dealt with the causes of employee turnover in Zimbabwean academic libraries, and the third covered the push and pull factors in the turnover intentions of academic libraries in Zimbabwe. Additional data was gathered by purposively sampling 6 senior librarians for interviews to triangulate the data gathered through the e-questionnaires.

### **Measures**

The intention to leave the organization was measured by three items following Mobley’s (1982) definition. The respondents were asked to indicate their agreement with the following three items on a five-point scale:

- (1) “I think a lot about leaving the organization.”
- (2) “I am actively searching for an alternative to the organization.”
- (3) “As soon as it is possible, I will leave the organization



The researcher analysed the data using content analysis to draw meanings from the research data. The analysis involved searching for recurring themes and comparing them with predefined categories that emerged from the literature on the turnover intentions of academic librarians in Zimbabwe.

### **Results and Conclusions**

The broad objective of this study was to establish the turnover intentions of academic librarians in Zimbabwe. The study revealed that there is a very high propensity to leave employment by academic librarians in Zimbabwe.

Seniority and academic qualifications was identified as a push factor for academic librarians to leave. Degree holders with high positions of Sub-Librarian and above generally indicated a strong inclination to stay with their organisations. On the contrary the junior librarians with careers that are yet to blossom exhibited high turnover intentions. This finding is in tandem with the research by Samuel & Chipunza (2009) who argues that turnover is high in lower level jobs in organisations. However, this is in contrast with the findings of a research by Hrebiniak & Alutto (1992) whose findings revealed that employee level of education and seniority in the organisation supposedly to lead to higher individual expectations, job dissatisfaction, and subsequently a more likely intention to leave.

The above mentioned trend was further supported by the finding that 60% of the respondents in the lower level grades indicated that there were no opportunities for progress in the profession in Zimbabwe. This apparent lack of career growth in the profession was cited as the reason why some academic librarians were considering leaving the profession. The library profession in Zimbabwe is clearly demarcated into two categories of professionals (university graduates) and para-professional (certificate and diploma holders). The para-professionals are finding it difficult to break a glass ceiling and enter into professional librarianship owing to a number hindrances in their way. This sad state of affairs has left junior level librarians thinking of leaving the profession to pursue other rewarding careers. The words of

one respondent clearly captures it all “I am thinking of joining the teaching profession so that I can get the recognition of my diploma”

The findings of this study revealed that employee job satisfaction is a key factor in explaining the turnover intentions of academic librarians in Zimbabwe. The study revealed that many academic librarians (66%) are currently dissatisfied with their jobs and are therefore considering either leaving their current employers or leave the profession all together. This finding is in tandem with research evidence from a studies by Balfour & Neff, (1993); Moyinhan & Pandey, (2008) and Morrow, et al. (2005) who concluded that job satisfaction to have an effect on workers’ intentions to look for another job. This finding, therefore, implies workers can be retained if their satisfaction levels are high and therefore create an ideal situation where job satisfaction has an inverse effect on turnover.

The research also identified satisfaction with leadership and supervision in academic libraries has a significant impact on academic librarians’ turnover intentions in Zimbabwe. This is also consistent with the findings of Mardanov et al., (2007) whose research revealed that the relationship between leaders and their subordinates is a key factor in shaping turnover intentions of the subordinates. Mill (2001) takes the argument further and argues that the quality of the relationship between an employee and his immediate supervisor prolongs the employee’s stay in an organization. Therefore employees tend to perform better and are more inclined to stay in the organisation if they are not closely supervised and instead given the freedom to exercise self-initiative. Brown, et al., (2009) stated that a strong correlation between leadership consideration and job satisfaction, whereas the correlation between leadership behaviour and turnover intentions is less pronounced

Age was another significant variable in influencing academic librarian’s turnover intentions in Zimbabwe. The study revealed that the younger the respondents, the more likely they were to leave the organization. This trend was observed across all academic libraries surveyed and confirms previous research by Blomme, et al., (2008); Gwavuya, (2011); Ng’ete, et al., (2012) who concluded that the younger the

employee, the less committed they are to their organizations and the higher their intentions to leave. Likewise, the research revealed that in the youngest age group, in which the respondents had just started their career, promotion opportunities and salary were cited as a key factor in explaining the intention to leave.

Poor salaries were identified as a key factor in influencing the turnover intentions of academic libraries in Zimbabwe. The findings revealed that academic librarians in Zimbabwe are considering leaving their current employers in search of higher salaries in the Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) sector where the respondents indicated were paying better. This finding is in tandem with other research findings (Chiboiwa, et al., 2010; Hillmer, et al., 2004; Jafari, 2011; Moyinhan & Pandey, 2008) which observes, rewards as a strong predictor of employee turnover intentions and serves as a basis upon which individual employees assess how the employer assesses their contribution to the organisation

Research has found employee salaries to be a significant predictor of employee turnover especially in the case of government employees (Selden & Moyihan, 2000). This is particularly significant if a comparison is made with the private sector. On the contrary the findings of this study reveals that the academic librarians in Zimbabwe are more inclined to stay in the state owned universities than move over to private universities. Instead the librarians in private universities (68%) indicated a deep inclination to move over to state-owned ones. This uncanny state of affairs may be explained by the comparatively competitive salaries that are currently prevailing in the state-owned universities. This strong effect of salaries of turnover intentions of academic librarians in Zimbabwe is also in line with research conducted the world over which confirms that money influences employee motivation and ultimately turnover (Callier, 2011; Zeffane, 1994; Selden & Moyihan, 2000)

Work in the academic library sector in Zimbabwe was described by the respondents particularly the junior is known to be “hard” and involves working “well into the night and over weekends”. This often means that adjustments between work and family life may become troublesome as observed by Blomme, et al. (2008) in their

study of the hospitality industry in the United States. Under such a state of affairs, managers are expected to take into account the needs of employees and try to make working conditions more bearable. The respondents in this study cited the long irregular working hours as a factor that nudges them to consider leaving their current employers. The present findings are therefore partially consistent with previous studies (Gwavuya, 2011; Kim, 2005; Morrow, et al., 2005) which identified a causal relationship between job stress and turnover intentions.

The study also explained the fact that turnover trends among academic librarians in Zimbabwe are influenced by the high opportunities for alternative employment outside the country. The research revealed that academic librarians (80%) consider employment outside Zimbabwe as a vibrant option to their current state of affairs. This is in tandem with the observations by Lambert & Hogan, (2009) who predicted external employment opportunities to have a direct positive effect on turnover intent. Closer to home, Chiboiwa, et al., (2010) made similar observations to the findings of this study and argued that there has generally been a skills flight from Zimbabwe to other economies and from the findings of this study such skills flight has not spared academic libraries.

The study revealed that the employment relationship in Zimbabwe is in constant state of flux with academic librarians pondering looking for alternative employment elsewhere. As suggested by, Bergmann, et al., (1994), Hrebiniak & Alutto, (1992), Ng'ete, et al., (2012) academic libraries in Zimbabwe should make concerted efforts to measure and manage turnover. Measuring involves such things as: surveys, consultation processes, intra- and extra-firm career guidance, exit interviews and leaver profiling.

### **Limitations of the study**

A major limitation of this study is that it made an attempt to measure an attitude towards leaving the organization, turnover intentions. Further studies needs to be carried out to validate if these intentions actually manifest into real turnover and

therefore come up with recommendations on how academic librarians in Zimbabwe can stem employee turnover.

A second question that warrants future research is how do the different factors identified in the study affect turnover decisions? Although this study was able to identify the various factors behind the turnover intentions of academic librarians in Zimbabwe, the study did not explain exactly why this is the case.

Finally, the study need to replicated by drawing and testing hypothesis and therefore causal relationships which can be applied in other professional fields and other settings.

### References

- [1] Armstrong, M., 2010. *Human Resource Management*. London: Kogan Page.
- [2] Balfour, D. & Neff, D., 1993. Predicting and managing turnover in human service agencies: A case study of an organisation in crisis. *Public personnel management*, 22(3), pp. 473-486.
- [3] Bergmann, T., Bergmann, M. & Grahn, J., 1994. How important are employee benefits to public sector employees. *Public personnel management*, 23(3), pp. 397-406.
- [4] Blomme, R., Tromp, D. & Van Rheede, A., 2008. Predictor of turnover intentions of highly educated employees in the hospitality industry. *Advances in hospitality & leisure*, 4(1), pp. 3-28.
- [5] Brown, S., Gaia, G. & Martin, C., 2009. Firm performance and labour turnover: Evidence from the 2004 workplace relations survey. *Economic Modelling*, Volume 26, pp. 689-695.
- [6] Callier, H., 2011. I want to quit: A closer look at factors that contribute to the turnover intentions of state government employee. *Local Government Review*, 43(2), pp. 110-122.
- [7] Chiboiwa, W., Samuel, M. & Chipunza, J., 2010. An examination of employee retention strategy in a private organisation in Zimbabwe. *African journal of business management*, 4(10), pp. 3-9.
- [8] Grover, S. & Crooker, K., 1995. Who appreciates family responsive human resource policies: The impact of family-friendly policies on the organisational attachment of parents and non-parents. *Personnel psychology*, Volume 48, pp. 271-288.

- [9] Gwavuya, F., 2011. Leadership influences on turnover intentions of academic staff in institutions in Zimbabwe. *Academic leadership journal*, 9(1), pp. 1-15.
- [10] Hillmer, S., Hillmer, B. & McRoberts, G., 2004. The real costs of turnover: Lessons from a call centre. *Human Resource Planning*, 27(3), pp. 34-41.
- [11] Hrebiniak, L. & Alutto, J., 1992. Personal and role related factors in the development of organisational commitment. *Administrative science quarterly*, Volume 16, pp. 555-572.
- [12] Jafari, A., 2011. Prime and sub prime factors of employee voluntary turnover in the boom phase of industry: Empirical evidence from banking sector of Pakistan. *African Journal of Business Management*, 5(15), pp. 6408-6414.
- [13] Kim, S., 2005. Factor affecting state government IT employee turnover intentions. *American review of public administration*, 35(2), pp. 137-156.
- [14] Lambert, E. & Hogan, N., 2009. The importance of job satisfaction and organisational commitment in shaping turnover intent: A test of a causal model. *Criminal Justice Review*, Volume 34, pp. 96-118.
- [15] Liden, R. & Maslyn, J., 1994. Multidimensionality of leader-member exchange: An empirical assesment of through scale development. *Journal of management* , 24(1), pp. 43-72.
- [16] Locke, E. & Latham, G., 2004. What should we do about motivation theory? Six recommendations for the twenty-first century. *Academy of management review*, 29(3), pp. 388-403.
- [17] Mbah, S. & Ikemefuna, C., 2011. Job satisfaction and employee turnover intentions in Total Nigeria plc. *Lagos international journal of humanities and social science*, 2(14).
- [18] Mill, S., 2001. Motivating your IT staff. *Computing Canada*, 27(19), pp. 26-27.
- [19] Mitchell, T. et al., 2001. Why people stay: Using job embeddness to predict voluntary turnover. *Academy of management journal*, Volume 44, pp. 1102-21.
- [20] Mobley, W., 1982. Some unasnwered questions in turnover and withdrawal research. *The academy of management review*, 7(1), pp. 111-116.
- [21] Morrow, P. et al., 2005. The role of leader-member exchange in high turnover work environments. *Journal of managerial psychology*, 20(8), pp. 681-694.

- [22] Moyinhan, D. & Pandey, S., 2008. The ties that bind: Social networks, person-organisation value fit and turnover intention. *Journal of public administration research and theory*, Volume 18, pp. 205-227.
- [23] Ng'ete, J., Namusonge, G. & Iravo, M., 2012. Influence of leadership style on academic staff retention in public universities in Kenya. *International journal of business and social science*, 3(21), pp. 297-305.
- [24] Samuel, M. & Chipunza, C., 2009. Employee retention and turnover: Using motivational variables as a panacea. *African journal of business management*, 3(8), pp. 410-415.
- [25] Selden, S. & Moyihan, D., 2000. A model of voluntary turnover in state government. *Review of public personnel administration*, Volume 20, pp. 63-74.
- [26] Steen, S., 2009. *Human Resource Management*. Toronto: Mc-Graw Hill.
- [27] Wagner, J., 1995. Studies of individualism-collectivism: Effects on cooperation in groups. *Academy of management journal*, 38(1), pp. 152-172.
- [28] Zeffane, R., 1994. Understanding employee turnover: The need for a contingency approach. *International journal of manpower*, 15(9), pp. 22-37.