

## **EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT AND PERFORMANCE OF SELECTED PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES IN DELTA STATE, NIGERIA**

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**ABSTRACT:** *In the present turbulent and unpredictable Nigerian business environment, the non-availability of employee voice in some private universities in Delta State has made employee turnover intention a major problem. The broad objective of the study is to determine the relationship that exists between employee engagement and performance of selected private universities in Delta State, while the specific objective is to ascertain the extent to which employee voice affects turnover intention of employees in the selected private universities in Delta State. Survey research design was adopted for the study, a total population of 254 employees in the selected private universities was used for the study, and the Taro Yamane sampling technique was used in selecting the sample size of 155 employees. The data collection tool employed by the researchers was the questionnaire, while the analysis of the data was done using the Pearson product moment correlation coefficient analysis. The findings revealed that there is a significant positive relationship between employee voice and turnover intention of employees in the selected private universities in Delta State. Based on the findings, the researchers concluded that when employees have a voice on matters that affects them in the organisation, it increases employees desire to stay in such organisation. The researchers however recommended that management of private universities should provide an avenue through which employees can express their opinions on matters that affects them.*

**KEYWORDS:** Employee Engagement, Employee Voice, Performance, Turnover Intention

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## **INTRODUCTION**

### **Background of Study**

Mokaya & Kipyegon (2014) are of the opinion that employee engagement involves creating prospects for employees to attach with their managers, colleagues & organisations. However, defining employee engagement is not straight forward; this is obvious from the existence of different definitions made by various researchers as each study examines employee engagement under a different procedure. Unless employee engagement can be universally defined and measured, it cannot be managed, nor can it be known if efforts to improve it are working. Employee engagement goes beyond job satisfaction, organizational commitment, job involvement and organisational citizenship behaviour.

Employee engagement has been found to be related to employee corporation, involvement, satisfaction and commitment; all of which have been used as proxies for employee engagement. However, employee engagement involves some functional variables which are beneficial to both the organisation and its employees, but are not limited to them. Such variables include employee voice, employee commitment, employee involvement, organisational citizenship behaviour, and job satisfaction. According to Armstrong (2012), employee voice refers to the

say employees have in matters of concern to them in their organisation. If employees are allowed to have a say in matters of concern in the organisation, it will hence improve organisational performance.

The performance of an organisation is also an important aspect of an organisation and thus, remains the most studied variable. It is hence the actual output or results of an organisation as measured against its intended outputs, objectives or goals. Organisations have however tried to explore ways to improve the performance of its employees. Some indicators of organisational performance include, but are not limited to, employee retention, turnover intention, promotion opportunities, productivity, employee commitment, job satisfaction, workers participation in management activities. Performance is considered as all-around module of an organization's human resource strategies.

Employee engagement and performance are critical for organizations because employees are the driving force to achieve the development and accomplishment of the organization's goals and objectives. In recent years, there has been an increase of students' enrolment in private universities in Nigeria. The establishment of private universities has been embraced in Nigeria as a means of expanding access to higher and quality education.

Teferra & Altbach (2004, cited in Edwin, Micah & John (2015) posits that private higher education is a growing trend in most African countries and although religious groups founded such institutions for specialized training, a good number of them have diversified their academic programmes so that at the moment they offer a wide range of academic and professional disciplines.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Employee engagement and performance seems to be a focus among business entrepreneurs and academic researchers, as well as issues pertaining to modern business environment. Hence, some private universities in Delta State are striving to increase engagement of its employees.

In the present turbulent and unpredictable Nigerian business environment, the non-availability of employee voice in some private universities in Delta State has made turnover intention a major problem. The awareness of having a job but knowing that it is not secure is stressful and a burden on employees' shoulders.

However, despite the critical role private universities play, the issue of engagement of employees by these universities and how it affects performance has been less documented. Most employees in these universities lack voice on matters of concern to them in the organisation, which is an important factor in employee engagement. The lack of employee voice has made turnover intention inevitable in these universities. These employees seem not to have an opinion on matters that affects them in the organisation due to the salient reason that private universities are un-unionised. As a result of this, they are being viewed as not been committed and this affects their intentions of staying in the organisation. Employees in these institutions clamour for a voice in their job because of the added benefits such as job security, prestige and increased experience that is ensured by it.

Based on the above, the study seeks to examine the relationship that exists between employees' engagement and performance of selected private universities in Delta State.

## **Objective of the Study**

The broad objective of this study is to determine the type of relationship that exists between employee engagement and performance of selected private universities in Delta State.

However, specifically, the study seeks to ascertain the extent to which employee voice affects turnover intention of employees in the selected private universities in Delta State.

## **Research Question**

To what extent does employee voice affect turnover intention of employees in the selected private universities in Delta State?

## **Research Hypothesis**

**H<sub>1</sub>:** There is a significant positive relationship between employee voice and turnover intention of employees in the selected private universities in Delta State.

## **REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

### **Conceptual Review**

#### **Employee Engagement**

The concept of employee engagement is not new as many researchers and organizations have been studying it for quite some time using different terms and definitions.

Kahn (1990) defines employee engagement as “the harnessing of organization members’ selves to their work roles; in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances”. The cognitive aspect of employee engagement concerns employees’ beliefs about the organisation, its leaders and working conditions. The emotional aspect concerns how employees feel about each of those three factors and whether they have positive or negative attitudes toward the organisation and its leaders. The physical aspect of employee engagement concerns the physical energies exerted by individuals to accomplish their roles. Thus, according to Kahn (1990), engagement means to be psychologically as well as physically present when occupying and performing an organisational role.

Robinson, Perryman & Hayday (2004 as cited in Markos & Sridevi, 2010) defined employee engagement as “a positive attitude held by the employee towards the organization and its value. An engaged employee is aware of business context, and works with colleagues to improve performance within the job for the benefit of the organization. The organization must work to develop and nurture engagement, which requires a two-way relationship between employer and employee.” However, the more engaged the employees are, the more likely the organisation is able to achieve its objectives.

From the aforementioned definitions, it can be seen that employee engagement takes various forms. However, for employee engagement to exist, there should be a two-way communication between the employer and the employee, and this involves the opinions of the employees being heard and taken into considerations.

## **Employee Voice**

CIPD (2015) defined employee voice as a two way communication between employer and employee. It is the process of the employer communicating to the employee as well as receiving and listening to communication from the employee.

Much research on individual employee voice has been dominated by applications of Hirschman's (1970) exit-voice-loyalty framework in which dissatisfaction can be expressed by quitting or complaining. Employee voice is being redefined in ways that go beyond the exit-voice framework's focus on expressing dissatisfaction (Dundon, Wilkinson & Marchington (2004).

Armstrong (2012) stated that there are four specific purposes for employee voice. First, it is to articulate individual dissatisfaction with management or the organization. Second, employee voice serves as an expression of collective organization to management. Third, it contributes to management decision making, particularly regarding work organization, quality, and productivity. Last, employee voice demonstrates the mutuality of the employer-employee relationship.

CIPD research suggested that 'organisations that seek to promote voice are those that believe that employees want to contribute to the business' and that 'for employees to have an effective voice'; the important part of the communication process is not what the employer puts out but what it gets back.

## **Organisational Performance**

Organisational performance is one of the most studied terms in management sciences. Pitcher Partners Growth (2016), opine that organisational performance relates to how successful an organised group of people with a particular purpose perform a function. It comprises of the actual output or results of an organisation as measured against its intended outputs, objectives or goals. However, high organisational performance exists when all the parts of an organisation work together to achieve great results.

Richard et al (2009, cited in wikipedia (2016)) posits that organisational performance encompasses three specific areas of firm outcomes: (a) Financial performance (b) Product market performance (c) Share holder return. It refers to the extent to which a firm is able to accomplish its stated objectives which can be in the area of market share, turnover, innovation, productivity, profitability, customers' satisfaction, etc.

## **Turnover Intention**

Turnover intention refers to an individual's intention to stay or leave the organisation.

Some salient factors of employee turnover intention include organisational justice, organisational citizenship behaviour, job satisfaction, job security, emotional stability, work environment, salary level, etc. For instance, most government jobs have higher levels of job security due to the presence of unions, when compared to private jobs. Jobs with strong union presence such as government jobs are considered very secure, while many non-unionized private sector jobs are generally believed to offer low job security.

According to Rosenblatt (1996, cited in Seyyed, Hamed & Fereshte 2013), lack of job security happens in two aspects. The first aspect is related to feelings that an individual has toward

his/her job setting such as transferring to a lower position in an organisation, firing or job stress. The second aspect refers to the feelings that an individual has for the wage and salary received, job promotion, lack of decision making and emotional job setting in the organisation.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The study is anchored on social exchange theory. Social exchange theory was introduced in 1958 by George Homans with the publication of his work "Social Behaviour as Exchange". Homans defined social exchange as the exchange of activity, tangible or intangible, and more or less rewarding or costly, between at least two persons.

Social exchange theory argues that obligations are generated through a series of interactions between parties who are in a state of reciprocal interdependence. A basic tenet of Social exchange theory is that relationships evolve over time into trusting, loyal, and mutual commitments as long as the parties abide by certain 'rules' of exchange (Armstrong,2012). Such rules tend to involve reciprocity or repayment rules, so that the actions of one party lead to a response or actions by the other party.

This theory is basically related to the present study in that once management tries to establish a close relationship with employees; by allowing them to have a voice/say in matters that affects them, the employees in turn would reciprocate by being committed to the organization and hence would not see the need to leave the organization.

### **Empirical Review**

Otieno, Waiganjo, & Njeru (2015) examined the effect of employee engagement on organization performance in Kenya's horticultural sector. Cross sectional survey research design and stratified sampling technique was used for the study. Questionnaires were used as instrument for data collection. Inferential statistics such as correlation and regression analysis were used to test the relationship that existed between the variables under study. Findings from the study revealed that employee engagement is significant. The study concluded that employee engagement is a major determinant of organisation performance in the horticultural sector in Kenya.

Nwinyokpugi (2015) carried out a research on employee engagement and work place Harmony in Rivers state civil service. From 10 ministries in the Rivers State Civil Service, Nigeria, 400 employees were randomly selected. Structured questionnaire was used for the purpose of data collection and data collected were tested using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation. The findings revealed that a significant relationship exist between the variables of employee engagement on workplace harmony in the studied sector.

Paluku (2016) carried out a study on Employee Engagement and Organizational Performance of Retails Enterprises in Wobulenzi-Luweero City, Uganda. The study measured employee engagement in relation with organizational performance focusing on non-financial factors. Correlational research design and purposive sampling technique was used. For the purpose of data collection, questionnaire was used and data was analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Person-product moment correlation coefficient was used in testing the formulated hypothesis. Findings revealed that retail employee engagement and job satisfaction were very high in the selected retailing enterprises.

Rees et al (2013) examined employee voice and engagement: connections and consequences in selected UK service sectors-support services partner and recycling and waste management company. The study was based on quantitative primary data collected from two UK service sector organisations during 2009. Reliability of the instrument was measured using cronbach alpha, and regression analysis was used in analysing the data. Analysis of data from the two organisations revealed that perceptions of voice behaviour and engagement were mediated by both employee trust in senior management and the employee–line manager relationship.

Agoi (2015) examined the effect of work engagement on employee turnover intention in Kenya public Sector. The study was anchored on theory of reasoned action and the theory of planned behaviour. Explanatory research design was used for the study. The target population were managers from public institutions. Questionnaire was used as a tool for data collection, and data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Pearson correlations and multiple regressions were used in testing the formulated hypotheses. Findings of the study indicated a negative significant effect of dedication and absorption on turnover intention.

Chun-Chang, Sheng-Hsiung & Chen- Yi (2012) carried out a study on factors affecting turnover intention of hotel employees. The researcher made use of linear structural modeling in exploring the factors that affects the turnover intention of hotel employees in Taiwan. A total of 400 questionnaires were distributed to the hotel employees. Findings of the study revealed that job satisfaction and salary level had no direct effect on turnover intention; however, higher salary levels, higher levels of job satisfaction, and higher levels of organizational commitment will lead to lower turnover intention.

Balakrishnan, Masthan & Chandra (2013) carried out a study on employee retention through employee engagement - A Study at an Indian International Airport. A total of 185 employees were chosen based on random sampling for the study. Data were collected through questionnaire and paired t-test used to analyse the data. Findings from the study revealed that the employee retention could be improved by increasing the level of employee engagement and focusing on few non-financial drivers.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

### **Research Design**

The research design adopted for the study was the descriptive survey research design. It was used because of the nature of the study. Survey research design enables the researcher to observe what happens to the sample subjects without manipulating them.

**Table 1: List of Private Universities in Delta State.**

S/N	NAME OF UNIVERSITIES	LOCATION	YEAR OF EXISTENCE	SOURCE
1.	Novena University	Ogume, Delta State	2005	<a href="http://nuc.edu.ng/nigerian-universities/private-universities">nuc.edu.ng/nigerian-universities/private-universities</a>
2.	Western Delta University	Oghara, Delta State	2007	<a href="http://nuc.edu.ng/nigerian-universities/private-universities">nuc.edu.ng/nigerian-universities/private-universities</a>
3.	Edwin Clark University	Kaigbodo, Ughelli	2015	<a href="http://nuc.edu.ng/nigerian-universities/private-universities">nuc.edu.ng/nigerian-universities/private-universities</a>
4.	Michael and Cecilia Ibru University	Agbara-Otor, Delta State	2015	<a href="http://nuc.edu.ng/nigerian-universities/private-universities">nuc.edu.ng/nigerian-universities/private-universities</a>

**Source:** Field Survey 2017.

The table above is a list of all the private universities in Delta State. The researchers selected 2 universities out of the 4 universities listed-Novena University, Ogume and Western Delta University, Oghara, based on years of existence of the universities.

### Population of Study

**Table 2: Population of the selected universities.**

S/N	UNIVERSITY	POPULATION
1.	Novena University, Ogume	110
2.	Western Delta University, Oghara	144
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>254</b>

**Source:** Field Survey 2017.

The table above shows the number of academic staff in the selected private universities as only academic staff was used for the study.

### Sample Size and Sampling Technique

The Taro Yamane's formula (1967) for sample size determination was adopted. The formula is written hereunder as:

$$n = \frac{N}{1+N(e)^2}$$

Where n = Sample size

N = Population of the study

e = Tolerable error (5%)

$$n = \frac{254}{1+254(0.05)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{254}{1+254(0.0025)}$$

$$n = \frac{254}{1.64}$$

$n = 155$ (Sample Size)

However, in determining the proportion of the questionnaire to be administered, the researchers made use Bowley's formula.

$$N_h = \frac{n \times n_h}{N}$$

Where;  $N_h$ = Number of units to be distributed to each group.

$n_h$  = Number of respondents in each group.

$n$ = Total Sample Size.

$N$ = Total Population Size.

**Table 3: Questionnaire Allocation**

S/N	UNIVERSITY	POPULATION	Q. ALLOCATION
1.	Novena University, Ogume	110	67
2.	Western Delta University, Oghara	144	88
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>254</b>	<b>155</b>

**Source:** Field Survey 2017

The table above shows the questionnaire allocation for the selected universities.

Simple random sampling technique was adopted for the study; which is a procedure of giving every subject in a population equal chance of appearing in the selection.

### Method of Data Collection

The data collection tool employed by the researchers was the questionnaire. It was divided into two sections. Section A and Section B. Section A contained questions relating to employee voice measured using a scale developed by Liang, Farh and Farh (2012), while section B contained questions relating to employee turnover intention. It was designed on a five point Likert Scale. Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), Strongly Disagree (SD) and Undecided (U). It was used because it enabled the collection of data from a primary source.

### Validity of the Instrument

Validity is the extent to which an instrument measures what it proposes to measure. The face and content validity test was used by the researchers.

### Reliability of Measuring Instrument

This measures the reliability of a particular instrument used by a researcher. The cronbach's alpha reliability test was used by the researchers.



**Reliability Statistics:****Cronbach's alpha values for section A of structured questionnaire****Table 4.1: Reliability Statistics for employee voice**

Cronbach's Alpha	Number of Items
.808	6

Source: SPSS ver. 23

The Cronbach's alpha on the test of measurement reliability scale for employee voice showed an alpha level of .808 which is above the generally accepted threshold of .70. Thus, the measurement is reliable.

**Cronbach's alpha values for section B of structured questionnaire****Table 4.2: Reliability Statistics for employee turnover intention**

Cronbach's Alpha	Number of Items
.798	7

Source: SPSS ver. 23

The Cronbach's alpha on the test of measurement reliability scale for employee retention showed an alpha level of .798 which is above the generally accepted threshold of .70. Thus, the measurement is reliable.

**Method of Data Analysis**

Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was used to analyse the data in order to ascertain the type of relationship that exist between the dependent and independent variable. The level of significance was 5%, while 95% confidence internal reliability was adopted.

**DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS****Data Presentation****Table 4.1: Questionnaire distributed and returned**

Number of Questionnaires Distributed	Number of questionnaires Returned
155	155

**Data Analysis****Table 4.2.1: Investigative questions on employee voice**

	SA	A	D	SD	UD	N	Sum	Mean	Remark
Management is willing to share decision making power with employees	34	20	72	3	26	155	524	3.38	Accept
I have input in organizational decisions.	22	33	62	7	31	155	519	3.35	Accept
I have freedom to make important decisions regarding my work	34	33	57	7	24	155	485	3.13	Accept
My organization communicates effectively and in a timely manner to its employees	44	28	77	3	3	155	506	3.26	Accept
There is a two-way communication between employer and employee	6	38	98	7	6	155	618	3.99	Accept
I feel that this organization values my opinions	3	6	142	1	3	155	738	4.76	Accept
Valid N (listwise)						155			

**Source:** Field survey, 2017.

**KEY:** SA-Strongly Agree (5 points), A-Agree (4 points), D-Disagree (3 points), SD-Strongly Disagree (2 points), U-Undecided (1 point). Total: 15 points; Mean: 3 points.

The table above shows an acceptance remark for all statements in response to investigative questions on employee voice and a grand mean of 3.65 which is above the decision threshold of 3.0.

**Table 4.2.2: Investigative questions on employee turnover intention**

	SA	A	D	SD	UD	N	Sum	Mean	Remark
The benefit associated with my current job prevents me from leaving my current job.	0	0	7	140	8	155	621	4.01	Accept
I feel uneasy about leaving my job in the near future.	31	18	31	2	73	155	533	3.44	Accept
Opportunities to achieve goals at my workplace are jeopardized.	22	31	33	6	63	155	522	3.37	Accept
My personal values at work are not compromised.	29	33	29	6	58	155	496	3.20	Accept
I have considered leaving my current job.	40	28	8	2	77	155	513	3.31	Accept
Absence of trade union makes my job unprotected.	6	38	9	6	96	155	613	3.95	Accept
My current job affects my personal wellbeing.	3	6	4	0	142	155	737	4.75	Accept
Valid N (listwise)						155			

**Source:** Field survey, 2017.

**KEY:** SA-Strongly Agree (5 points), A-Agree (4 points), D-Disagree (3 points), SD-Strongly Disagree (2 points), U-Undecided (1 point). Total: 15 points; Mean: 3 points.

The table above shows an acceptance remark for all statements in response to investigative questions on employee retention and a grand mean of 3.72 which is above the decision threshold of 3.0.

## TEST OF HYPOTHESIS

### Research Hypothesis

**H<sub>1</sub>:** There is a significant positive relationship between employee voice and turnover intention of employees in the selected private universities in Delta State.

**Decision Rule:** Reject the null and accept the alternate hypothesis if p value < .05. If otherwise, accept the null.

**Table 4.3.1: Correlations**

		Employee Voice	Employee Retention
Employee Voice	Pearson Correlation	1	.897**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	155	155
Employee Retention	Pearson Correlation	.897**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	155	155

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: SPSS ver. 23

## SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

### Summary of findings

The table above shows a Pearson product-moment correlation run to determine the relationship that exists between employee voice and turnover intention of employees. The result shows that p-value (0.000) < 0.01 (at a 2-tailed test). This means that the result is statistically significant at a 5% confidence level. The r value 0.897 shows that there is a strong positive relationship between employee voice and turnover intention of employees in the selected private universities in Delta State. This explains that the presence of employee voice strongly affects turnover intention of employees in the selected universities.

This agrees with the work of Balakrishnan et al (2012) who asserts that employee retention can be improved by increasing the level of employee engagement and focusing on few non-financial drivers. Non-drivers used by Balakrishnan et al (2012) for the study included employee voice.

The presence of unions in an organisation usually affects the turnover intentions of employees; and since most private universities do not recognise unions which in essence provide employees with a voice, this however affects the rate of turnover intention.

### Conclusion

Based on the findings, the researchers concluded that there is a significant positive relationship between employee voice and turnover intention of employees in the selected private universities in Delta State. This implies that when employees have a say/voice on matters that

affects them in the organisation; it however increases employees desire to stay in such organisation.

### Recommendation

Based on the findings of the study, the researchers recommended that management of private universities should provide an avenue through which employees could express their opinions on matters that affects them.

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