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An Examination of the Association between Non - Retention of Trained Casual Employees on Operational Efficiency in Higher Learning Institutions in Zambia: The Case of University of Zambia

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Abstract

Background: The increasing prevalence of temporary employment contracts in higher education institutions (HEIs) globally has become a significant concern, raising questions about its impact on both individuals and institutions. This trend, particularly among academic staff and researchers, has been documented in various contexts. (Times Higher Education, 2023).

Methodology: The study used primary data sources and was collected using questionnaires. The study had a sample size of 405 respondents and were chosen using simple random sampling. The study is mixed study thus an explanatory sequential research design was appropriate to determine the effects of non-retention of trained casual employees on the UNZA. Data collected from the questionnaires were coded in Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version (25.0). Demographic profiles and themes were presented using graphs Statistical methods such as Pearson's correlation, chi-square analysis and regression analysis were used to answer the hypothesis statement of the study.

Results: The study found that non-retention at UNZA is driven by multiple, closely related employment challenges rather than a single issue. It was revealed that there is an association between non retention of trained casual employees on operational efficiency at UNZA. The showed that most respondents believe that non-retention of casual employees negatively impacts customer service quality.

Conclusion: The study demonstrates that the non-retention of trained casual employees at UNZA is a multifaceted issue with significant operational and financial consequences. The findings show that non-retention is driven by interrelated employment conditions particularly perceived unfair treatment, job insecurity, low wages, and poor working conditions rather than a single factor. Statistically, non-retention was found to have a strong and significant relationship with operational efficiency, indicating that the loss of trained casual staff undermines institutional performance.

Keywords: Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS), UNZA

1. Introduction

1.1 Background to the Study

The increasing prevalence of temporary employment contracts in higher education institutions (HEIs) globally has become a significant concern, raising questions about its impact on both individuals and institutions. This trend, particularly among academic staff and researchers, has been documented in various contexts. For instance, in Sweden, temporary employment rates in academia are more than double the national average, with 32% of research and teaching staff holding fixed-term positions as of 2022 (Times Higher Education, 2023). A 2020 estimate found that approximately 28% of researchers and teaching personnel worldwide are on temporary contracts (University World News, 2022) ^[59]. These arrangements often involve hiring individuals for specific periods or tasks without offering the long-term job security or benefits typically associated with permanent positions. This practice is common for roles such as adjunct professors, research assistants, and, importantly for this study, casual employees who provide crucial support within HEIs.

The impact on career progression for those on temporary contracts is notable. These individuals often face challenges like limited access to professional development opportunities, reduced participation in institutional governance, and uncertainties

about future employment prospects (University World News, 2022) ^[59]. Research indicates that these conditions can negatively affect job satisfaction, especially among highly educated individuals. A study by Waaijer *et al.* (2017) ^[63] found that PhD holders on temporary contracts reported lower job satisfaction compared to their counterparts with permanent contracts.

Moreover, this lack of stability can influence personal life aspects, such as obtaining mortgages or starting families, due to the financial insecurity associated with short-term employment (Waaijer *et al.*, 2017) ^[63].

The structural reliance of universities on contingent and casual labour is a product of decades of neoliberal higher education reform, yet its contemporary manifestations have been rendered more visible and more consequential by the disruptions of the COVID-19 pandemic and the economic turbulence of the early 2020s (Tight, 2022).

Luo & Zheng (2022) documented how public universities in East Asia intensified their dependence on fixed-term and casual academic and support staff following the pandemic-induced contractions in government subvention, noting that institutions in China, South Korea, and Japan reported increases of between 18% and 34% in the proportion of non-permanent staff between 2019 and 2022.

Tight (2022), in a comprehensive review of higher education management research, argued that the persistent framing of casual staff as peripheral or supplementary workers fundamentally misrepresents their operational centrality in contemporary universities.

Acai *et al.* (2023) conducted a mixed-methods study across twelve Canadian universities and found that departments with high proportions of trained casual support staff, but weak retention and recognition systems, exhibited significantly lower scores on administrative responsiveness, student satisfaction, and process reliability compared to departments with formalised casual staff integration frameworks.

Lim & Tham (2024) examined operational efficiency indicators at universities in the United Kingdom and Singapore, finding that institutions with formalised casual employee development programmes demonstrated superior performance on key operational metrics, including turnaround time on administrative requests, examination irregularity rates, and facilities maintenance response times.

Blackmore (2022) observed that the accelerated adoption of digital work platforms and remote service delivery models during the COVID-19 period differentially affected casual and permanent staff, with casual employees typically receiving less access to digital training, remote work infrastructure, and institutional support systems.

Ouma & Bosire (2022) conducted a longitudinal analysis of workforce composition at eight East African public universities between 2010 and 2022, finding that the proportion of casual employees in operational and support roles had grown from an average of 31% to 54% over this period. This expansion was driven primarily by government-imposed hiring freezes, budget rationalisation programmes, and the outsourcing of non-core services to casual labour pools trends that the authors linked empirically to measurable deteriorations in service quality, institutional memory retention, and staff engagement.

Ndlovu & Mpofu (2023) examined the effects of casual employment practices on operational efficiency at three Zimbabwean public universities and discovered that

departments characterised by high casual staff turnover experienced recurrent operational disruptions attributable to the loss of trained institutional knowledge.

Ndlovu & Mpofu (2023) study documented cases in which university departments were required to retrain replacement casual employees on systems and procedures multiple times within a single academic year incurring both direct training costs and indirect productivity losses during orientation periods. Ndlovu & Mpofu (2023) estimated that this cyclical retraining burden consumed between 12% and 19% of departmental operational budgets that could otherwise have been directed toward service improvement and infrastructure maintenance.

Xulu-Gama (2021) analysed workforce data from six South African universities and found that historically disadvantaged institutions employed disproportionately higher ratios of casual to permanent staff in both academic support and administrative functions compared to historically advantaged institutions, a pattern she attributed to differential access to state funding and the legacy of resource inequalities in the higher education system.

Xulu-Gama (2021) demonstrated that casual employees at historically disadvantaged institutions received, on average, 43% fewer formal training hours per annum than their counterparts at better-resourced institutions, undermining the human capital development that would otherwise enable casual workers to contribute more effectively to institutional operations.

Mwanza & Simutowe (2021) conducted a study of human resource management compliance at Zambian public universities in the post-Employment Code Act environment and found that a significant proportion of casual employees at institutions including Copperbelt University (CBU), and Mulungushi University continued to be engaged on terms inconsistent with the employment Act's requirements.

In South Africa, contract academic staff experience precarity due to insecure working conditions (Times Higher Education, 2023). The reliance on numerical flexibility through hourly-paid, part-time workers also highlights issues related to managing temporary labor effectively within higher education settings (Ibid, 2023).

1.1.1 The position of University of Zambia (UNZA) management and how it is to retain casual employees in terms of labour laws, strategic inform and budget implication constraints

The University of Zambia (UNZA), as Zambia's premier public university, carries the complex mandate of delivering quality higher education while operating within a challenging fiscal and regulatory environment. Its Human Resource Department is tasked with recruitment, staff development, performance management, and employee welfare, with the broader goal of aligning workforce management with the institution's mission of academic excellence and innovation (University of Zambia, 2025).

Within this mandate lies a growing and consequential tension around the management of casual employees workers engaged on non-permanent terms who perform essential operational functions in areas such as maintenance, horticulture, and auxiliary services, without the employment security, statutory benefits, or career pathways associated with permanent positions. The question of whether to retain, regularise, or discontinue such workers intersects with national labour law, institutional strategy, financial

sustainability, and critically — the long-term operational capability of the university itself.

The legal framework within which UNZA manages casual employees has undergone significant reform. The Employment Code Act No. 3 of 2019 — which consolidated and replaced four earlier pieces of employment legislation including the Employment Act of 1965 explicitly prohibits casualisation under Section 7, defining it as the practice of engaging workers on repeated short-term or casual contracts for work that is permanent in nature (Government of the Republic of Zambia, 2019). This legislative development represented a decisive policy shift by the Zambian government toward the protection of workers in precarious employment relationships.

For UNZA, this trajectory of legislative reform creates an increasingly constrained operational environment: the longer the university continues to engage casual workers in roles that are permanent in nature (Ministry of Labour and Social Security, 2024).

The greater its legal exposure to enforcement action by the Labour Commissioner's Office, whose powers under Part II of the Employment Code Act include the authority to investigate and sanction employers found to be in breach of the anti-casualisation provisions (Ministry of Labour and Social Security, 2024).

The legal vulnerability of casual employees is compounded by the asymmetry of statutory protections between permanent and casual workers. While the Employment Code Act includes casual employees within the definition of 'employee', in practice the Act's substantive protections regarding minimum notice for termination, access to severance benefits, and trade union representation are more effectively accessed by workers on permanent contracts than by those engaged on casual terms continent (ISS African Futures, 2024).

UNZA's reliance on casual employment for permanent operational functions is therefore not an institutional anomaly but rather a manifestation of a systemic pattern of labour precarity that is attracting growing regulatory and advocacy attention across the continent (ISS African Futures, 2024).

Zulu & Mhlongo (2024) demonstrate that wage bill constraints significantly influence staffing decisions in public institutions. Zulu & Mhlongo (2024) indicated that when a large portion of the budget is allocated to salaries, management tends to limit permanent employment to avoid unsustainable financial commitments.

In Zambia, public universities such as UNZA face additional challenges including debt obligations and delayed funding. These financial pressures restrict the institution's ability to regularise casual employees despite recognising the benefits of doing so (Zulu and Mhlongo, 2024).

Chanda & Phiri (2023) found that over 40% of public sector institutions rely on temporary or casual labour to manage operational costs. Similarly, Bimenyimana- *et al.* (2024) ^[10] report that casual employees often earn significantly lower wages and lack access to benefits compared to permanent staff.

These findings suggest that casualisation is not only a labour issue but also a structural response to economic constraints. In universities, this affects service delivery, employee morale, and institutional stability (Bimenyimana- *et al.* (2024) ^[10].

Ncube & Tichagwa (2022) show that public sector organisations often adopt pragmatic approaches to employment decisions, balancing compliance with resource availability. At UNZA, this results in a cautious approach where casual employees are retained for operational needs but not rapidly absorbed into permanent roles.

Alajlani & Yesufu (2022), in a study examining the impact of human resource practices on employee retention in higher education institutions, found that retention is strongly associated with working conditions, compensation equity, access to professional development opportunities, and the perceived fairness of employment terms — all dimensions on which UNZA's casual workers score poorly relative to permanent staff. The practical consequences of this retention failure are operationally significant.

A systematic review by Galan (2023), synthesising 91 empirical studies on knowledge loss induced by organisational member turnover, found that the departure of experienced employees generates a broad range of negative organisational effects at both unit and institutional level, including loss of tacit operational knowledge, disruption to service continuity.

Kwanya (2022), whose study of the University of Nairobi Library found that staff turnover resulted in the loss of organisational memory, creation of gaps in service delivery, high costs of training and recruitment, low commitment among remaining staff, and increased workloads a constellation of consequences directly applicable to UNZA's operational environment when trained casual workers are not retained.

Kuuyelleh, *et al* (2022), in a study of academic staff retention strategies at Ghanaian technical universities, found that the absence of career development opportunities and inadequate compensation packages were among the most critical drivers of staff attrition in resource-constrained African higher education institutions, with work-related and economic factors constituting the primary determinants of retention decisions.

Leontes (2024), in a study of talent management and employee retention in the South African higher education landscape, found that career management, rewards, and management style were the most significant talent management dimensions associated with employee retention.

Understanding how UNZA navigates this convergence and what its current management position on the retention of trained casual employees entails in practice is the central institutional problem that motivated and justified the present study.

1.1.2 Statistics of UNZA in terms of employees

UNZA employs approximately 879 academic staff and 1,621 administrative staff, yielding a combined permanent staff complement of around 2,500 individuals and the casual staff are 175 employees (Koivisto, & Maboshe, 2022).

Existing research on temporary employment in higher education often focuses on academic staff and researchers, with less attention given to the specific challenges related to casual employees. While studies on broader talent management and retention provide valuable insights (Noe *et al.*, 2021), they may not fully capture the unique dynamics at play within the context of casual employment in Zambian HLIs.

For instance, factors such as limited opportunities for permanent employment, potentially less competitive compensation compared to the private sector, and perceived lack of career development prospects may be particularly salient for casual employees (Armstrong & Taylor, 2020) [6]. These factors can contribute to a "revolving door" effect, where trained employees leave for better opportunities elsewhere, creating a cycle of loss and reinvestment for the institution.

While the literature on temporary academic staff is substantial, less attention has been paid to the specific challenges faced by casual employees in HEIs. These employees, often hired for specific tasks or projects, may receive valuable training to enhance their skills and contribute effectively to the institution. However, their non-retention after training represents a potential loss of investment for the HEI (University World News, 2022) [59]. This loss includes not only the direct financial costs associated with training but also the loss of institutional knowledge and experience that these employees accumulate. Furthermore, high turnover among casual staff can disrupt workflows, reduce productivity, and negatively impact the overall efficiency of the institution. Similar concerns about precarious employment and its impact on individuals and institutions have been raised in other contexts.

While these studies provide valuable insights into the broader challenges of temporary employment in higher education, there is a need for research that specifically examines the impact of non-retention practices on trained casual employees in Zambian HEIs (Waaiker, *et al.*, 2017) [63].

In Zambia, the higher education sector is pivotal for national development, with institutions like the University of Zambia (UNZA) playing a central role in producing graduates who can contribute to the country's economic and social progress. Effective human resource management within these institutions is crucial for achieving their mission, especially in a context where higher education has seen significant growth and transformation over the past two decades (Kajala & Daka, 2023). Despite this growth, the sector faces challenges such as inadequate teaching and learning facilities, insufficient qualified teaching staff, and limited capacity to develop relevant curricula, all of which threaten the quality and recognition of higher education in Zambia (Higher Education Authority, 2023). The Higher Education Authority (HEA) has been instrumental in regulating and enhancing educational standards across higher education institutions (HEIs) in Zambia. Established under the Higher Education Act No. 4 of 2013, the HEA oversees accreditation processes, sets educational standards, and ensures institutional compliance with national policies (Masaiti & Simuyaba, 2018).

Recent reforms, including the Higher Education (Amendment Act) No. 23 of 2021, have expanded the HEA's mandate to include collaborative accreditation with professional bodies and classification of HEIs (HEA, 2023). However, despite these efforts, challenges persist. The University of Zambia, as one of the country's premier HEIs, has had to adapt to HEA regulations, including revising its curriculum to emphasize practical skills and employability, and adjusting enrolment numbers to comply with permissible admission requirements and lecturer-student ratios (HEA, 2023). Casual employees frequently receive training, representing an investment by the institution in

their skills and knowledge. However, the non-retention of these trained casual employees poses a significant challenge. The issue of non-retention of trained casual employees within such institutions is a critical concern that affects not only the efficiency and effectiveness of these institutions but also the broader quality of education they provide.

This study addresses a significant gap in the literature by exploring the effects of non-retention practices on trained casual employees at UNZA. It investigates the reasons behind the non-retention of these employees, the specific impacts on the university, and potential strategies for improving retention rates. This research is timely and necessary to inform policy and practice within the Zambian higher education sector and contribute to a broader understanding of the challenges and opportunities associated with managing a diverse workforce in resource-constrained environments.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Mwansa & Hapompwe (2023) investigated causes of voluntary employee turnover at Ecobank Zambia and identified job dissatisfaction, inadequate compensation, and limited career development as primary drivers, but their study was confined to the private financial sector and did not examine the operational efficiency implications of non-retention.

A study at the Zambia Revenue Authority (ZRA) by Kalimanzila *et al.* (2024) established that skills training was significantly associated with employee commitment and retention, the study did not extend its analysis to important support staff engaged under short-term contracts.

Research by Mwanza & Munsanje, (2022) showed that at the University of Zambia (UNZA) specifically, research has established that high staff turnover including among non-academic support personnel is associated with knowledge attrition, decreased operational efficiency, and increased organizational costs.

Mwanza & Simutowe (2021) conducted a study of human resource management compliance at Zambian public universities in the post-Employment Code Act environment and found that a significant proportion of casual employees at institutions including Copperbelt University (CBU), and Mulungushi University continued to be engaged on terms inconsistent with the employment Act's requirements. Mwanza & Simutowe (2021) study did not consider how non-retention of employees affected operational efficiency of public universities.

Against this background this study aimed to fill this gap by examining the association between non-retention of employees and operational efficiency at UNZA.

1.3 General Objective

The general objective of this study was to examine if there is an association between non – retention of trained casual employees and operational efficiency at UNZA.

1.3.1 Specific Objectives of the Study:

1. To explore the factors contributing to the non-retention of trained casual employees at UNZA.
2. To assess if there is an association between non-retention of trained casual employees and UNZA's operational efficiency.
3. To determine the financial implications of non-retention of trained casual employees for UNZA.

1.4 Research Questions

1. What are the factors contributing to the non-retention of trained casual employees at UNZA?
2. How does the non-retention of trained casual employees affect the operational efficiency of the University of Zambia?
3. What are the financial implications of non-retention practices for the University of Zambia, including recruitment costs, training expenses, and potential losses in human capital?

1.5 Theoretical Framework and Conceptual Framework

1.5.1 Theoretical Framework Development

The theoretical and conceptual framework of this study provides a structured approach to understanding the complex dynamics surrounding the non-retention of trained casual employees in higher learning public institutions, specifically at the University of Zambia. By integrating foundational theories such as Human Capital Theory, Job Embeddedness Theory, and Expectancy Theory, this framework offers a comprehensive perspective on the factors influencing employee retention. Human Capital Theory highlights the economic implications of losing trained employees, while Job Embeddedness Theory explores the social and organizational factors that influence retention decisions. Expectancy Theory delves into the motivational aspects driving employee choices. This chapter outlines how these theories inform the conceptual model, which identifies key variables and their relationships to provide a nuanced understanding of the non-retention phenomenon. The study on the effects of non-retention of trained casual employees at the University of Zambia (UNZA) is grounded in three foundational theories: Human Capital Theory, Job Embeddedness Theory, and Expectancy Theory. Each theory provides a unique perspective on the factors influencing employee retention and organizational efficiency.

1.5.2. Human Capital Theory

Developed by Gary Becker (1964) ^[9], Human Capital Theory emphasizes the economic value of skills and knowledge. It posits that investments in education and training enhance organizational performance by increasing productivity and earnings. This theory is particularly relevant to the study as it frames the non-retention of trained casual employees as a loss of organizational investment. UNZA invests in training these employees, and their departure represents a loss of this investment, potentially detracting from the university's productivity and efficiency. Human Capital Theory provides a framework for quantifying the costs associated with training and the subsequent loss of that investment when employees leave.

1.5.3 Job Embeddedness Theory

Introduced by Mitchell *et al.* (2001) ^[32], Job Embeddedness Theory suggests that employees' decisions to stay or leave are influenced by their "links" to the organization (connections to people and teams), "fit" with the organization (compatibility with the job, organization, and community), and "sacrifice" (what they would lose by leaving). This theory is useful for understanding the factors that influence the retention of trained casual employees. The study can explore how the lack of these elements might contribute to non-retention. For instance, if casual employees feel disconnected from their teams or see few opportunities for career advancement, they may be more

likely to leave. This theory helps identify areas for intervention to strengthen job embeddedness and improve retention.

1.5.4 Expectancy Theory

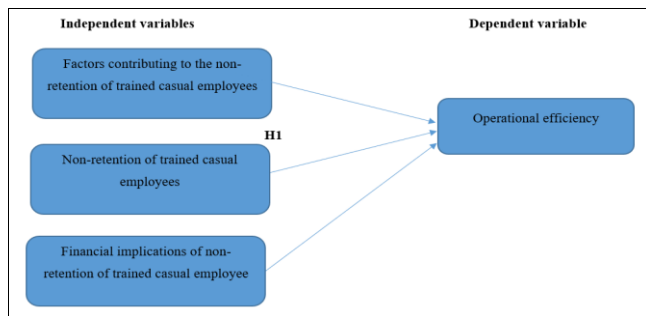
Proposed by Victor Vroom (1964) ^[62], Expectancy Theory posits that motivation is a function of three beliefs: expectancy (the belief that effort will lead to performance), instrumentality (the belief that performance will lead to rewards), and valence (the value placed on the rewards). This theory can be applied to understand the motivation and retention of casual employees. If these employees have low expectancy (e.g., they don't believe hard work will lead to permanent employment), low instrumentality (e.g., they don't believe good performance will be recognized), or low valence (e.g., they don't value the rewards offered), their motivation to stay will be low. The study can use this theory to explore how UNZA's reward system, performance management practices, and career development opportunities influence the motivation and retention of casual employees.

1.5.5 Justification for Using Multiple Theories and comparisons between the theories

Employing multiple theories is justified because each provides a distinct perspective on the complex issue of non-retention. Human Capital Theory highlights the economic implications of losing trained employees, Job Embeddedness Theory focuses on the social and organizational factors influencing retention, and Expectancy Theory explores the motivational aspects driving employee decisions. The three theories are best understood as complementary rather than competing. Human Capital Theory establishes why retaining trained workers matters economically the productive capacity they embody has value that is destroyed when they leave. Job Embeddedness Theory explains why casual workers at UNZA are structurally vulnerable to departure the conditions of their employment systematically undermine the fit, links, and sacrifice dimensions that would otherwise keep them attached. Expectancy Theory explains how the motivational psychology of casual employees responds to these structural conditions predicting efficiency losses that are generated not only by departure itself but by the demotivating conditions of casualization that precede it. Together, the three theories provide a comprehensive and multi-layered theoretical framework for understanding the mechanisms through which the non-retention of trained casual employees at UNZA is associated with reduced operational efficiency.

1.5.6 Conceptual Framework

This conceptual model illustrates the multifaceted nature of non-retention among trained casual employees at UNZA. It posits that non-retention, the dependent variable, is influenced by a combination of independent variables, including Expectancy and Motivation, Job Embeddedness, Training Investment, Financial Implications, and Operational Efficiency. These factors represent potential areas for intervention by UNZA to improve retention. Furthermore, the model incorporates demographic characteristics (age, gender, etc.) as intervening variables, recognizing that these characteristics can moderate the relationship between the independent variables and non-retention. By examining these factors and their interrelationships, the model provides a framework for understanding the complex dynamics of employee turnover and developing effective retention strategies.



Source: Author's Compilation, 2026

Fig 1: Conceptual Framework

The conceptual model for this study proposes that the non-retention of trained casual employees at UNZA is influenced by several key factors:

Dependent Variable

Operational Efficiency: Operational Efficiency involves the ability of an institution to manage its resources effectively, which can impact how it retains employees by influencing factors such as workload distribution, resource allocation, and overall productivity.

Independent Variables:

Non retention of employees: Failure of an organization to keep or continue employing casual workers after they have been trained and have acquired job-specific skills and competencies. It involves situations where trained casual staff leave voluntarily (due to better opportunities or dissatisfaction) or involuntarily (due to contract expiration or institutional policies). In universities, this phenomenon is particularly significant because casual employees often perform essential academic and administrative roles.

Their departure results in a loss of institutional knowledge and disrupts continuity in operations, as new employees must be recruited and trained repeatedly.

Financial Implications: Financial Implications refer to the economic costs associated with training and losing employees, which can influence organizational decisions and strategies related to employee retention.

Factors Contributing to the Non-Retention of Trained Casual Employees: Refers to the various organizational, economic, and individual conditions or circumstances that influence trained casual workers to leave an institution after acquiring skills and experience. These factors may include low wages, lack of job security, limited opportunities for career advancement, poor working conditions, inadequate recognition, and weak organizational support systems.

In the context of universities, such factors often arise due to the temporary nature of casual employment, where employees may not receive long-term contracts, benefits, or professional development opportunities. Consequently, even after being trained, these employees may seek more stable and rewarding employment elsewhere, leading to high turnover.

2. Literature Review

2.1 The factors contributing to the non-retention of trained casual employees

Choso & Wetaba (2019)^[12] focused on employee retention among teaching professionals in East African secondary

schools, where teacher turnover has been linked to declining educational outcomes. Choso & Wetaba (2019)^[12] study population consisted of teachers from both public and private schools, providing a comparative perspective on working conditions. Choso & Wetaba (2019)^[12] employed a mixed-methods approach that comprised questionnaires and interviews in order to document both measurable trends and the unique perspectives of the teachers. The results of Choso & Wetaba (2019)^[12] showed that wage levels, training accessibility, and school leadership practices significantly influenced teachers' willingness to remain with their institutions, even while limited promotion opportunities contributed to attrition.

Ochieng *et al.* (2021) looked on the dynamics of skilled professionals' retention in the private sector, particularly in service-oriented enterprises. Ochieng *et al.* (2021) study population consisted of workers in technical and managerial roles in companies operating in urban labour markets. Using a quantitative cross-sectional approach, Ochieng *et al.* (2021) collected survey data on organisational culture, pay structures, work satisfaction, and leadership support.

Ochieg *et al.* (2021) findings demonstrated that corporate culture and perceived fairness in incentive systems were significant factors of retention, but job insecurity and limited growth chances led people to search for alternatives elsewhere. Ndung'u & Karanja (2023)^[42] examined talent management and employee retention at public universities, focusing on academic and professional staff in East Africa. Ndung'u & Karanja (2023)^[42] study group included university employees from a variety of departments in their study population.

Ndung'u & Karanja (2023)^[42] employed a quantitative research design with structured questionnaires and regression analysis to determine the effect of talent management practices on retention outcomes. Ndung'u & Karanja (2023)^[42] research revealed that mentoring programs, clear promotion pathways, and institutional recognition systems significantly increased retention rates. Ndung'u & Karanja (2023)^[42] study did not address gender-specific barriers or family-related issues that may influence retention decisions.

Ćwiąkała *et al.* (2025), focused on professionals involved in technical advancement, innovation, and research in their study of modern staff retention strategies in knowledge-based industries. Ćwiąkała *et al.* (2025), study population consisted of workers from organisations with high skill demand and fast technological development.

Ćwiąkała *et al.* (2025), employed a mixed-methods strategy that comprised both quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews in order to gain a deeper understanding of the structural and psychological elements that affect retention. The findings of Ćwiąkała *et al.* (2025), showed that inclusive organisational cultures, flexible work schedules, and opportunities for creativity significantly enhanced employee commitment, but rigid hierarchical structures hindered sustained involvement.

Mwale (2022) looked at employee retention in public institutions, with a focus on competent people whose knowledge was crucial to institutional continuity. The study's population consisted of professionals in technical and administrative roles, and the relationships between organisational support, leadership styles, and retention intentions were investigated using a quantitative survey method. The findings of Mwale (2022) showed that

organisational commitment was increased by participatory leadership styles and recognising employee contributions, whereas bureaucratic rigidity decreased employee desire to stay. Sandhya & Kumar (2015) ^[51] study examined the impact of HRD practices on employee retention in business organisations. Sandhya & Kumar (2015) ^[51] were able to investigate retention across several occupational groupings because the study sample comprised employees from a range of departments in private businesses.

Using regression analysis, Sandhya & Kumar (2015) ^[51] discovered that a lack of organisational support increased turnover intentions, career planning, performance feedback systems, and training opportunities significantly increased retention. Sandhya & Kumar (2015) ^[51] study focused solely on corporate environments and did not address the public sector or educational institutions.

Sishuwa & Phiri (2020) study looked at issues influencing academic staff performance and retention in Zambian higher education institutions. The study's participants were academic staff members and lecturers hired by public universities, many of whom had rigorous administration, research, and teaching responsibilities. To capture institutional realities influencing academic job circumstances, the researchers used a qualitative research approach bolstered by interviews and document analysis. The results of Sishuwa & Phiri (2020) showed that while institutional support for postgraduate training and research collaboration enhanced commitment to stay in academia, insufficient financing for research, a heavy teaching load, and few prospects for advancement had a detrimental impact on staff motivation and retention. Sishuwa & Phiri (2020) study also emphasised how staff unhappiness was influenced by structural limits in higher education systems, such as a lack of resources and restrictions on policies.

Bichsel *et al.* (2023) aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the factors underlying the higher education retention crisis in the United States, specifically examining the reasons employees were considering leaving, the characteristics of those at risk, and the institutional practices most likely to sustain retention. Their target population comprised employees across academic, administrative, and non-exempt support staff categories in United States colleges and universities, and the study recruited a sample of 4,783 higher education employees across 539 institutions. The methodology was a large-scale quantitative survey design, administered online during April 2023 using a structured questionnaire, with analysis conducted through descriptive statistics, factor analysis, and predictive regression modelling. The results of Bichsel *et al.* (2023) revealed that, that job satisfaction and well-being operationalized through sense of belonging, feeling valued by the institution, and perceived organisational care — were stronger independent predictors of retention than pay alone.

Kuuyelleh *et al.* (2022) aimed to explore the retention strategies employed by Ghanaian technical universities and to identify the work-related and economic factors that determined whether academic staff remained in or departed from their institutions. The target population comprised academic staff at technical universities across Ghana, which share many structural characteristics with other resource-constrained African public higher education institutions. Kuuyelleh *et al.* (2022) used a qualitative research design employing in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, with data analysed through thematic analysis grounded in

organisational equilibrium theory. The results of Kuuyelleh *et al.* (2022) demonstrated that work-related and economic factors were the two principal clusters determining retention decisions.

Mugo & Siagi (2024) aimed to identify and empirically examine the factors most significantly associated with the retention of academic staff in Kenyan private universities, with particular attention to remuneration challenges, career progression constraints, and working environment conditions. The target population comprised academic staff holding doctoral qualifications at three private chartered universities in Kiambu County, Kenya Mount Kenya University, St. Paul's University, and Greta University with a total target population of 2,074.

The sample of 309 respondents was determined using the Yamane (1967) formula and distributed proportionately across three strata. The methodology was a quantitative cross-sectional survey design using a five-point Likert scale questionnaire, with analysis conducted through descriptive statistics, correlation, and regression analysis in SPSS. The results of Mugo & Siagi (2024) confirmed that remuneration inadequacy, career progression constraints, and uncondusive working environments were the three most significant factors associated with staff non-retention, with salary inadequacy relative to cost-of-living increases documented as the most frequently cited driver of departure intention.

Resnick (2023) aimed to investigate the determinants of organisational commitment among local government bureaucrats in Zambia, with specific attention to mission alignment, compensation, working conditions, and career development as predictors of employees' willingness to remain in their positions. The target population comprised bureaucrats across Zambia's district councils, with 153 respondents drawn from 16 councils across the country. The methodology was a quantitative cross-sectional survey design using a structured questionnaire, with analysis employing regression techniques to isolate the independent predictors of retention commitment.

The results of Resnick (2023) revealed that only 40% of surveyed Zambian public sector employees expressed commitment to remaining in their current positions over the following five years a strikingly low retention-readiness rate for public institutions mandated to provide continuous services.

2.2 The association between non-retention of trained casual employees and operational efficiency of Universities

Akoto *et al.* (2024) aimed to examine the effect of training practices on job performance among non-teaching staff at public universities in Ghana. The target population comprised non-teaching staff at public universities in Ghana and the sample comprised 370 non-teaching staff members recruited through a multi-stage sampling procedure. The methodology was a quantitative survey design using a structured questionnaire, with data analysed through Structural Equation Modelling using AMOS software to test direct, mediating, and moderating relationships simultaneously. The results confirmed of Akoto *et al.* (2024) that there is an association between non-retention of trained casual employees and operational efficiency of public universities.

Kwanya (2022) aimed to determine the impact of employee turnover on the institutional knowledge base of the

University of Nairobi Library, examining turnover-contributing factors, the types of turnover experienced, and the concrete operational effects generated by knowledge loss across library service delivery functions. The target population comprised library staff at the University of Nairobi across all employment categories, including permanent, contract, and casual positions, and the sample comprised 64 library staff members. The methodology was a mixed methods design combining a quantitative questionnaire survey and qualitative key informant interviews, with descriptive statistics applied to quantitative data and thematic analysis applied to interview transcripts. The results of Kwanya (2022) revealed that there is an association between non-retention of trained casual employees and operational efficiency of public universities. Nzimande *et al.* (2023) aimed to identify the factors influencing the motivation of contract staff in South African universities and to establish the relationship between employment tenure conditions, motivational states, and the quality of academic service delivery. The target population comprised contract academic staff delivering Extended Curriculum Programme modules at South African universities of technology, and data were collected through semi-structured qualitative interviews with contract lecturers across multiple institutions, complemented by secondary analysis of Department of Higher Education and Training statistical data. The methodology was qualitative with thematic analysis grounded in Herzberg's two-factor theory and Adams' Equity Theory, using an inductive approach to identify emergent motivational themes from interview transcripts.

Nzimande *et al.* (2023) discovered that there is an association between non-retention of trained casual employees and operational efficiency of South African public universities.

2.3 The financial implications of non-retention of trained casual employees of universities

Nzimande *et al.* (2023) examined the financial dimension of non-retention in the context of South African universities. Nzimande *et al.* (2023) study demonstrated that high turnover additionally eroded the morale and engagement of remaining staff a consequence with substantial indirect financial significance, as reduced morale correlates with lower productivity, increased error rates, elevated absenteeism, and heightened turnover risk among the retained workforce.

Bimenyimana *et al.* (2024) ^[10] looked into strategies for retaining academic staff in higher education institutions in Zambia. Academics and researchers working for quickly expanding and institutionally reforming universities were among the study's participants. Bimenyimana *et al.* (2024) ^[10] used a mixed-methods approach that combined survey data with interviews to document both statistical links and the lived experiences of staff members.

The results of Bimenyimana *et al.* (2024) ^[10] demonstrated that research funding opportunities, institutional support for postgraduate supervision, and transparent promotion procedures significantly enhanced retention, but significant administrative responsibilities affected job satisfaction.

Leite *et al.* (2024) ^[25] looked at talent retention from a global perspective in knowledge-intensive businesses across many countries. The study population consisted of professionals working in sectors driven by innovation and

research productivity. A quantitative design supported by multivariate statistical analysis revealed that flexible work arrangements, inclusive leadership.

3. Data Sources and Analysis

The study utilized a **self-administered questionnaire** as the quantitative data collection tool. Quantitative data collection tools for this study were primarily include surveys administered to 345 trained casual employees at UNZA. The survey instrument was designed to measure the independent variable (non-retention of trained casual employees) and the dependent variable (operational efficiency at UNZA). Likert scales were used to quantify perceptions and attitudes related to these variables. Additionally, demographic data (age, gender, position, education level, duration of service, and department) were collected to serve as intervening variables. Secondary data, such as employee records related to training participation, performance evaluations, and length of employment, was utilized to supplement the survey data and provide objective measures related to non-retention.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 30 senior managers and 30 front-line employees making a total of 60 employees, selected purposively to provide diverse perspectives on the effects of non-retention of trained casual employees at UNZA. The interviews were guided by a well-structured interview guide aligned with the research objectives, focusing on key topics such as non-retention of trained casual employee, operational efficiency, financial implications of non-retention of trained casual employees.

Data collection procedures involved both quantitative and qualitative methods to gather comprehensive insights. Data collected from the questionnaires was cleaned to ensure accuracy and completeness, coded in Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version (25.0). Demographic profiles were presented using graphs and tables. To explore the effects of non-retention of trained casual employees on UNZA, inferential statistical methods such as Pearson's correlation, regression analysis and chi-square analysis, was employed to determine the relationship between the independent variables and dependent variable of the study, answer the research objectives and hypothesis statements of the study.

The combination of Pearson's correlation, regression analysis chi-square analysis enabled this study to have comprehensive and reliable results.

For the qualitative interview data, the recordings were transcribed verbatim to ensure that participants' responses were accurately captured. The transcripts were then analyzed using thematic analysis.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Objective1: To explore the factors contributing to the non-retention of trained casual employees at the UNZA

It was discovered that most respondents claimed that casual employees leave due to low wages/salary. It was revealed that most of the respondents stated that inadequate training and development opportunities discourages retention.

The results showed that most of the study participants believe that poor working conditions lead to casual employees quitting. The findings of this study indicated that the majority of respondents believe that Lack of career growth opportunities makes casual employees to leave.

The results revealed that most respondents believe that unfair treatment between casual workers and permanent staff affects retention. From the results of the study it was established that the majority of the respondents indicated that lack of job security contributes to high turnover among casual employees.

The Human Capital Theory, originally advanced by Becker (1964) [9], posits that investment in employee training and skills development constitutes a form of capital accumulation that enhances individual productivity and organisational value. This theory is directly applicable to the first objective, which sought to explore the factors contributing to non-retention. The findings revealed that UNZA invests considerably in the training and capacity development of casual employees; however, the absence of corresponding retention mechanisms results in the loss of this accumulated human capital when trained employees exit the institution.

From a Human Capital Theory perspective, such attrition represents a misalignment between organisational investment and retention strategy, whereby the returns on training investment are not realised due to premature employee departure.

From literature the results of this study are supported by the findings of Dess & Shaw, (2001) Research which revealed that inadequate compensation and unfavorable working environments are key predictors of employee dissatisfaction and voluntary turnover, especially among skilled workers whose remuneration does not match their competencies.

The findings of the current research are also correlated by a previous study conducted by Kezar *et al.* (2019) which discovered that limited access to resources such as research funding, office space, and professional development opportunities are the factors contributing to the non-retention of trained casual employees.

4.2 Objective 2: To assess if there is an association between non-retention of trained casual employees and UNZA's operational efficiency

This objective was formulated into an hypothesis statement and was tested Pearson's correlation, chi-square analysis and regression analysis.

The findings of the Pearson's correlation between non-retention of trained casual employees and UNZA's operational efficiency had correlations coefficient of 0.921** which indicated that non-retention of trained casual employees is predictor of UNZA's operational efficiency. Furthermore the results from the chi-square had a probability (p) value <0.005 which indicates that non-retention of trained casual employees has an influence UNZA's operational efficiency.

The above findings from the Pearson's correlation and chi-square test showed that the non-retention of trained casual employees has an effect on UNZA's operational efficiency and the two variables share a very strong association.

The first model in regression analysis had an adjusted R-square value of 0.849, which also shows that none retention of trained casual has a strong association with operational efficiency In the second model the adjusted R-square rose to 85.2 %, which suggests a moderate improvement in model fit. The change statistics showed that the R-square change was 0.003 with an F-change value of 4.264 (P=<0.05).

This increase from the 84.9% adjusted R square value explained in Model 1 shows that None retention of trained

casual employees, Time employed as a casual workers, and Financial implication of none-retention of trained casual employees, contribute significantly to explaining variations in operational efficiency.

The findings of this study are also in support of the human capital theory which shows that Human Capital Theory provides a framework for quantifying the costs associated with training and the subsequent loss of that investment when employees leave.

The above findings of the study are supported by the results of Kanyumba and Lourens (2021) [21], study which discovered that casual employees in South African universities lack long-term engagement with the institution, leading to knowledge loss, inefficiency, and declining academic support services.

The findings of this study are also supported by the results of Becker, (1993) [9] study which showed that high turnover among trained employees undermines organizational efficiency through loss of experience, reduced productivity, and increased operational costs.

4.3 Objective 3: To determine the financial implications of non-retention of trained casual employees for UNZA

It was discovered most respondents claimed that high turnover of casual employees increases recruitment costs. It was revealed that most respondents believe that frequent hiring and training of new casual staff reduces productivity.

The results showed that most of the respondents believe that losing trained casual employees leads to operational disruptions. The findings of this study indicated that most of the study participants believe that the organization spends excessively on repeated training due to turnover.

The results revealed that most respondents believe that non-retention of casual employees negatively impacts customer service quality. From the results derived from the study it was established that most respondents stated that the financial cost of replacing casual employees is higher than retaining them.

Job Embeddedness Theory, as conceptualised by Mitchell *et al.* (2001) [32], argues that employee retention is determined by the degree to which individuals feel connected to their organisation and community through links, fit, and sacrifice. This framework speaks directly to the second objective, which examined the association between non-retention and UNZA's operational efficiency.

The findings suggest that casual employees at UNZA exhibit low levels of organisational embeddedness, attributed to the precarious nature of casual employment, limited career progression pathways, and inadequate organisational integration. Consequently, the lack of embeddedness contributes to high turnover, which in turn disrupts institutional continuity, reduces team cohesion, and diminishes overall operational efficiency, as vacated roles necessitate repeated recruitment and retraining cycles.

These findings align with existing literature, by Hom *et al.*, (2017) which emphasizes that employee turnover increases recruitment and training expenses, reduces organizational efficiency, and can negatively affect service delivery.

The findings of the current research are in agreement with a previous study by Bimenyimana *et al.*, (2024) [10] which established that the failure to retain trained casual employees has resulted in several challenges, including inefficiency, financial strain, loss of institutional knowledge,

declining morale, and weakened student and staff support systems.

5. Conclusion

This study aimed to examine if there is an association between non – retention of trained casual employees and operational efficiency at UNZA.

In relation to the first objective, the study found that a significant number of employees In relation to the first objective, the study found that a significant number of employees identified **factors affecting the retention of trained casual employees recorded agreement levels above 50%**, indicating that non-retention at UNZA is driven by **multiple, closely related employment challenges** rather than a single issue. The factor with the highest agreement is **unfair treatment compared to permanent staff (56.25%)**. These findings aligned with equity theory, which suggests that employees who perceive unequal treatment in terms of rewards, benefits, and recognition are more likely to experience dissatisfaction and develop intentions to leave. Empirical studies by De Cuyper *et al.*, (2011) further confirm that perceived inequity between casual and permanent employees significantly reduces organizational commitment and retention.

Lack of job security also emerged as a major contributor to high turnover among trained casual employees. **Low wages or salaries and poor working conditions** further contribute to non-retention.

The second objective on assessing UNZA's operational efficiency was achieved using Chi-square analysis, Regression analysis and Pearson's correlation. The chi-square test results indicated a **p-value of 0.000**, which is **less than the 0.05 significance level at 95% confidence**. This demonstrated a **statistically significant association** between the **non-retention of trained casual employees and UNZA's operational efficiency**. According to standard statistical decision rules, when the p-value is less than 0.05, the **null hypothesis should be rejected** (Field, 2018; Pallant, 2020).

The findings of the Pearson's correlation between non-retention of trained casual employees and UNZA's operational efficiency had correlations coefficient of 0.921 which indicated that non-retention of trained casual employees is a strong predictor of UNZA's operational efficiency. The above findings of the study were supported by the results of Kanyumba and Lourens (2021) ^[21], a study which discovered that casual employees in South African universities lack long-term engagement with the institution, leading to knowledge loss, inefficiency, and declining academic support services.

Regarding the third objective, the non-retention of trained casual employees at the University of Zambia (UNZA) has several significant financial implications. High turnover among casual staff increases recruitment costs, as the institution must continually invest in attracting new employees, a concern reflected by most of the respondents. The majority of the respondents indicated that frequent hiring and training of new casual employees also reduces overall productivity, as time and resources are diverted from core operations to on-boarding activities. The results also showed that losing trained casual employees can cause operational disruptions, potentially affecting workflow continuity and service delivery, which was highlighted by the highest percentage of 52.84%.

Overall, the study has theoretical contributed by establishing that the non-retention of trained casual employees at UNZA is a multifaceted issue with significant operational and financial consequences. The findings show that non-retention is driven by interrelated employment conditions particularly perceived unfair treatment, job insecurity, low wages, and poor working conditions rather than a single factor.

Statistically, non-retention was found to have a strong association with operational efficiency, indicating that the loss of trained casual staff undermines institutional performance.

6. Recommendations

Based on the research findings, the study recommends that UNZA has to:

Factors contributing to the non-retention of trained casual employees at UNZA

1. Firstly, the university should enhance job security for casual employees by introducing longer contract periods or creating pathways for transition into permanent roles. This would reduce uncertainty and increase employee commitment.
2. Secondly, UNZA should strengthen career development opportunities by offering continuous training, mentorship programs, and clear career progression frameworks. When employees perceive growth opportunities, they are more likely to remain within the institution.
3. Additionally, the university should improve working conditions and employee welfare, including fair remuneration, recognition programs, and supportive supervision. Establishing a positive organizational culture that values casual employees will foster a sense of belonging and reduce turnover intentions.

The Association between Non-Retention of Trained Casual Employees and UNZA's Operational Efficiency

1. The university should develop and implement retention policies that ensure workforce stability, which is essential for maintaining consistent service delivery and productivity.
2. Furthermore, UNZA should invest in human resource planning and workforce management systems to monitor turnover trends and identify areas where non-retention is affecting operational performance. This will enable timely interventions and improve efficiency in academic and administrative processes.
3. The university should also promote knowledge management practices, such as proper documentation, training manuals, and knowledge-sharing platforms, to minimize the negative impact of employee turnover on institutional operations.

The Financial Implications of Non-Retention of Trained Casual Employees for UNZA

1. UNZA should adopt cost-effective strategies that reduce unnecessary expenditure associated with frequent recruitment and training. One key recommendation is to invest in retention-focused policies, as retaining trained employees is more cost-effective than replacing them.
2. Additionally, the university should conduct regular cost-benefit analyses to assess the financial losses associated with turnover and justify investments in retention strategies. This will help management make informed financial decisions.

3. UNZA should also improve its budget allocation for human resource development, ensuring that funds are not repeatedly spent on training new employees due to high turnover. Instead, resources should be directed towards sustaining and retaining existing skilled employees.

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