

Navigating the Challenges of Lecturers' Retention in South Africa: Perspective of a Rurally Located University

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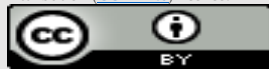
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Abstract: Most university students do not get the opportunity to graduate in the presence of their first-year lecturers because those lecturers may have moved to another university. The identified challenge is that universities, notably those located rurally, cannot retain their lecturers for extended periods. Therefore, the study explores the challenges hindering lecturers' retention in a rurally located South African University. The qualitative study included 14 participants from the selected university, using purposive and convenience sampling methods. A semi-structured interview was used to elicit information from the participants within the principles of Participatory case study design. Braun and Clarke's six-step thematic analysis method was adopted to analyse the data thematically. The study found that salaries and benefits, along with physical working conditions, are institutional challenges to retaining lecturers, while factors such as lack of stability and loss of interest at work are internal and external challenges affecting lecturers' retention in their workplaces. The study

concluded that institutional challenges are within the control of university administration and addressing them can help retain more lecturers. On the other hand, internal and external challenges, such as lack of stability and loss of interest at work, are more complex and require individual attention from the lecturers themselves.

Keywords: Lecturers' retention, university lecturers, institutional challenges, rural university, internal and external challenges.

1. Introduction

A higher institution of learning serves as an environment where lecturers teach, students learn, and society benefits in multiple ways. The quality of the learning the students receive is dependent on the quality of the lecturers the university system employs (Mihăilă-Lică et al., 2015). Students suffer when universities fail to retain their best and most experienced lecturers; thus, investing in lecturers can yield positive results, such as enhanced student achievement and the fostering of economically active graduates. According to Mohammed et al. (2020), the university's workforce diminishes when lecturers resign. Rizki et al. (2020) argue that some challenges leading lecturers to leave are associated with Human Resource Management (HRM). Mohammed et al. (2020) stated that workload, reward, and recognition are practices that play a vital role in HRM's responsibility to retain lecturers. Hence, ensuring a conducive environment for retaining productive lecturers will boost university productivity, allowing the university to continue being an asset to the country (Yusoff et al., 2013). To maintain such productivity, the implementation of motivational strategies, including promotion, a conducive work environment, and commensurate remuneration, is paramount.

Hee et al. (2020) confirm that factors such as opportunities for promotion, salary, work environment, workload, relationships with staff, and administrative style are crucial contributors affecting lecturers' retention in universities. When these factors are inadequate, academic staff experience dissatisfaction and seek better, alternative opportunities (Chipunza & Matsumunyane, 2018), often culminating in resignation from their current institutions. On one hand, management bears

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responsibility; on the other, lecturers face various challenges, including external and personal factors that can lead to resignation.

According to Nasir (2020), imbalances between work and life, exemplified by working after hours during the week and on weekends, result in lecturer discontent, leading to fatigue and eventual resignation. However, unstable working hours are sometimes the result of poor time management on the part of the individual. Additionally, superior offers from other institutions, involving higher salaries, compatible workloads, and enhanced career advancement opportunities, might contribute to the issue (Bakar et al., 2015). In essence, inadequate time management skills can lead to resignation, and when a better offer emerges, the previous employer is perceived as negligent. Consequently, a higher turnover of academics poses numerous challenges to higher education, including incurring additional costs for the induction and training of new staff, loss of research outputs and organisational productivity, and a reduction in the quality of teaching due to mid-semester replacements of lecturers (Barkhuizen et al., 2020). Thus, the presence or absence of lecturers significantly influences a university's goodwill.

Comparatively, the educational system in Tanzania is faced with the same problem. It was reported that over ninety academic staff members in one institution moved to another university (Matimbwa & Ochumbo, 2019). Makerere University in Uganda is still faced with the challenge of staff retention, as the university cannot keep members of its academic staff for extended periods (Bakkabulindi and Amutuhaire, 2020). Also, most universities in Zimbabwe have even turned into training centres for other higher institutions of learning (Mapolisa, 2014). Perhaps this is responsible for a recommendation that the Human Resources (HR) department must ask academic staff who are resigning to provide reasons for resigning. This will assist the Human Resource Department in being cognizant of the situation and handling it against future recurrence (Chivandire, 2019).

In Turkey, for example, more skilled workers move to universities that offer better opportunities (Aytac & Aydin, 2019). Even Finland is also known for its short-term contracts for researchers, which consequently leaves the research unit with no stability. Therefore, one will have no option but to seek greener pastures (Zafar and Kantola, 2019). Burkina Faso and Senegal (a few of the sub-Saharan countries) are also facing the problem of staff retention in their universities. Skilled labourers, such as lecturers, move from one university to another, leaving the other university with scarce resources (lecturers) for growth (Bredtmann et al., 2019). Staff retention problem also exists in South Africa, where some lecturers move because of the pressure to publish or perish, among other factors (Rensburg et al., 2018). Apart from literature, my personal experience in a university also showed that lecturers migrate from one university to another. Most of them even migrated not because of high positions but because they left to hold the same position they left. The foregoing suggests that retaining lecturers in universities in developing countries is a reality that a number of universities have to deal with.

While the phenomena of migration and retention of lecturers are well-acknowledged and have been a focal point of numerous studies (Mohammed et al., 2020; Rizki et al., 2020; Mahoko & Omodan, 2023), there is a discernible gap in scholarly literature exploring the pronounced prevalence and complex dynamics associated with this issue specifically in universities located in rural environments. It is posited that universities in rural settings encounter challenges in retaining academic staff, potentially stemming from a confluence of distinctive socio-economic, infrastructural, and professional development constraints inherent to these locales (Aytac & Aydin, 2019; Zafar & Kantola, 2019). These constraints may present in the form of limited access to resources, diminished opportunities for career advancement, or isolation from academic communities and networks (Omodan, 2022). Despite the heightened complexities presented by these conditions, the nuanced struggles and adaptive strategies employed by rural universities to combat staff attrition remain significantly underexplored and are seldom highlighted in the overarching discourse surrounding

lecturer migration and retention. This dearth in focused scholarly exploration necessitates a more nuanced investigation into rural universities' unique circumstances and adaptive strategies in navigating staff retention.

The prevailing literature and anecdotes substantially highlight the broader aspects of lecturer retention, yet there is a conspicuous absence of focused studies and discussions unravelling the nuanced experiences of universities in rural locales. The multitude of challenges leading to lecturer migration—from seeking better opportunities, a conducive work environment, to more rewarding remuneration—are generally well-understood, but how these factors intertwine with the specific conditions and limitations of rural settings is not sufficiently addressed.

1.2 Objectives of the study

Based on this, the study explores challenges hindering lecturers' retention in a rural South African University with the following specific objectives:

- Examined institutional challenges towards retaining lecturers.
- Investigated both internal and external challenges faced by lecturers leading to migration.

2. Theoretical Framework

The Herzberg two-factor theory is adopted for this study. In 1959, Frederick Herzberg came up with the motivation-hygiene theory (Mehrad, 2020). For this study, the theory plays a significant role in providing solutions for challenges influencing lecturers' retention in universities. According to McConville et al. (2017), "Herzberg's two-factor theory proposes that human beings have two basic sets of needs, intrinsic and extrinsic and different elements of the job serve to meet these two sets". In other words, Herzberg averred that if the factors influencing the lecturers' retention are provided, universities will be able to retain their lecturers. Through the Herzberg theory, there were suggested solutions for the research problem. On this occasion, if the failure to retain lecturers is left without being addressed, it will affect productivity negatively. According to Ssali et al. (2019), lecturers face the following challenges: poor sense of belonging, lack of job ownership, salary scale and administrative responsibility held, which could be categorised as demotivation factors that could affect retention of workers at the workplace. For instance, assessing job satisfaction of lecturers is a fundamental step for universities to improve quality and job satisfaction of lecturers as well as attract and retain lecturers (Bui, 2019).

Frederick Irving Herzberg's theory emphasises that when employees' needs are met, they will cooperate, which involves the training and development of lecturers as a motivator (Anh, 2020). Universities with such demotivating factors end up losing their lecturers to other universities where they will enjoy better benefits. In this context, Frederick Herzberg believed that better benefits consisting of motivators such as recognition, achievement, work itself, the opportunity for advancement and responsibility lead to job enrichment and enhanced retention (Khalid, 2013). In some studies, it was discovered that when employees are attached to the organisation, one would not experience stress at the workplace. Stress is one factor contributing to the university's inability to retain employees (Putri & Setianan, 2019). As a result, the university has to compile a retention policy and the objective of retention policies should be to identify and retain committed employees for as long as it is mutually profitable to the institution and the lecturer (Nasir, 2020). Therefore, the theory is suitable for the study since its principles align well with the intention to transform universities' inability to retain their best hands for the job.

3. Methodology

The transformative paradigm (TP) is the research paradigm for the study. This paradigm is focused on attaining social justice (Mertens, 2010). In this case, TP serves as a lens by which reality is socially constructed. This study focuses on the challenges influencing lecturers' retention in a South African

university. Therefore, the predicament involved in retaining lecturers for the purpose of unhindered university productivity will be transformed. Romm (2014) also argued that the adoption of this paradigm by the researcher is to promote the results that transform the community where the research takes place.

The qualitative approach to research is chosen for this study. As stated by Mishra and Alok (2022), qualitative research is concerned with qualitative phenomenon, i.e., relating to quality or variety. In other words, the qualitative approach is suitable for challenges influencing lecturers' retention in a South African University. Hence, the approach influences the design, data collection and analysis method for this study. In this case, the qualitative research approach is used because through the interviews, the approach assists in developing a better understanding of why lecturers are struggling to work for one university for a longer period (Dawadi et al., 2021). As a result, the qualitative research approach is suitable for the study because it guides the study towards developing guidelines for universities to enhance lecturer retention policies.

The Participatory Case Study (PCS) was used as a research design. Reis et al. (2014) defined PCS as a systematic enquiry, with the collaboration of those affected by the issue being studied for the purpose of education and taking social action or effecting change with a particular case study. The PCS influenced the way the data was gathered within the selected case in the selected university. The case study was conducted at one university. Therefore, the PCS is relevant for this study because the stakeholders were involved in the process of finding solutions to the problem. This is because the participatory case study encourages the use of social reality and collaborative strength to address issues (Reis et al., 2014). In this study, the issue of lecturers' retention with the selected university was jointly addressed.

3.1 Data collection

The semi-structured interviews were used for gathering data. Semi-structured interview is perceived to have more potential than other types of interviews because it allows researchers to acquire in-depth information and evidence from interviewees while seriously considering the focus of the study (Ruslin et al., 2022). This method is suitable for the study because it is a method of data collection for a qualitative research approach that addresses the case of staff retention from research objectives perspectives where participants were able to share their experiences, thoughts and ideas towards finding lasting solutions to the problem.

3.2 Selection of participants

The study was conducted in a rurally located university in South Africa. The study comprises 14 participants, i.e., six lecturers, four human resources management staff, and four university management (Heads of Departments (HoDs)/Deans). The human resource employees were selected using the purposive sampling method because they are responsible for the recruitment and welfare of the lecturers and other staff members. In other words, they have knowledge of the reasons for the low lecturer turnover rate. According to Sedgwick (2013), university management, such as Deans, are suitable candidates for taking part in the research; on this occasion, lecturers' supervisors have an idea of what challenges lecturers are experiencing. As people with first-hand experience, lecturers with at least three years of work experience can explain the problem better and are most likely to come up with solutions. Therefore, convenient sampling was used to select both management staff and lecturers with the designated experiences. Convenient sampling enables the researcher to get in touch with the participants with as little effort as possible, as they are available members of the targeted population (Omodan, 2020).

3.4 Data analysis

Thematic Analysis (TA) was used to analyse the data generated from the interviews. Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step of doing TA was adopted for this study. As noted by Braun and Clarke, the steps for analysing data were: Step 1: Know your data. This means researcher must read through the collected data, interviews and discussions for more understanding and clarity. Step 2: Creating codes. This is the process of allocating the data into different categories. Step 3: Hunting for themes. At this stage, the researchers are aware of the codes of the collected data from step 2. Accordingly, this stage resulted in themes and sub-themes being identified. Step 4: Re-organise themes. Now that themes exist from step 3, the same themes were re-organised to determine whether or not there is an order. Step 5: Naming the themes. At this stage, themes are given names. At the end of this stage, there were written theme names for the collected data. Step 6: Write a report. After step 5, there is step 6, which is all about analysing the data generated from the collected data. According to Braun et al. (2014) and Mahoko et al. (2019), TA helps to determine patterns in the responses of the participants to develop relevant themes; in this case, the themes are based on the objectives of the study. The TA method is considered suitable for the study because it responds to the two objectives in the themes and provides the study with the information analysed in themes and sub-themes from the data generated.

3.5 Ethical considerations

The study was approved by the ethics committee of the researcher's university, with the protocol number is UFS-HSD 2021/0707/21. The permission to research on the university's premises was requested and obtained (Maree, 2016). The following considerations were made for the study participants: The participants were asked for their permission to participate. Next, a consent form was included for them to sign. The anonymity of the participants and the confidentiality of the information were adhered to. The participants were informed that they could withdraw from the study whenever they wished. Finally, the identity and personality of the participants were not harmed in any way (De Vos et al., 2017). Please note that pseudonyms, as well as the job titles of the participants, as mentioned when analysing the data are indicated in the table 1 below.

Table 1: Job title and pseudonym of participants

Job title	Pseudonym
Assistant Dean no. 1	AD1
Assistant Dean no. 2	AD2
Assistant Dean no. 3	AD3
Assistant Dean no. 4	AD4
Human Resource no. 1	HR1
Human Resource no. 2	HR2
Human Resource no. 3	HR3
Human Resource no. 4	HR4
Lecturer no. 1	L1
Lecturer no. 2	L2
Lecturer no. 3	L3
Lecturer no. 4	L4
Lecturer no. 5	L5
Lecturer no. 6	L6

4. Presentation of Data

Data were presented to respond to the two objectives; They are to examine institutional challenges towards retaining its lecturers and investigate both internal and external challenges faced by lecturers, which affect their retention mentioned above. Each objective has two themes that directly respond to the objectives.

4.1 Examine institutional challenges towards retaining its lecturers

These sections responded to objective number one, and the following two themes emerged from the data: Salaries and benefits, and Physical working conditions.

4.1.1 Objective 1, theme 1: Salaries and benefits

Every employee of the university is remunerated in one form or another, and lecturers happen to form part of the employees of the university. As a result, they are remunerated by the university every month in the form of salaries and benefits. These salaries and benefits are utilised to maintain the type of lifestyle that they live. That is, owning properties, driving cars, children attending good schools and having the means to afford a vacation of their choice during the university breaks and holidays. According to Masum et al. (2015) when the lecturers are happy with their salaries and benefits, then they will continue working for the university, but if they are not happy, they will work for other universities where salaries and benefits are enough for their lifestyle. Participants have raised their challenges with the salaries and benefits at this one particular university as follows:

HR2: "Yeah, performance management, merit bonuses. There is performance management whereby they get a promotion. Yes, most of them are just promotions. 13th cheque bonus is for every employee of the university who is permanent."

AD1: "So the challenge is that some universities offer better remuneration. If you look at the new universities that are in the market, they offer higher salaries. That is why the biggest issue is to do with remuneration because you look at people in other cities; they earn better than those in our university."

Higher salaries seem to be a way that other universities attract lecturers from their competitors, but if they offer higher salaries, what else are they not offering that other universities are offering their employees. This question can only be answered by lecturers who have moved to well-paying universities and universities with lower salaries. The financial goals of lecturers vary to the extent that a salary amount that is enough for one lecturer might not be enough for the other lecturer. Hence, some lecturers will complain about the salaries and benefits, and others will not. If another university is willing to pay more than the lecturer earns, other lecturers are most likely to work for the university with the highest salaries.

L6: "Then, again, the reward system, the university may wish to consider, you know, increasing salaries, provided the funds are readily available."

Another participant mentioned that the university should consider increasing the salaries, which confirms that the university could be struggling to provide what is considered a good salary. But again, lecturers may not know what goes into determining a salary for them. For instance, the university in question is a rural campus, so the salaries provided at a rural campus will not be provided at an urban campus simply because the standard of living is not the same for both campuses.

HR4: "One of it principally has to do with the pay they receive. I think it is because of money. Maybe it is not enough, it is not a competitive rate."

Many participants mentioned that the salaries the lecturers earn are lower when compared to other universities. And lecturers who have left the university complained about their salaries, and nothing changed for them, which is why they decided to leave and go to universities offering higher salaries to meet their financial needs. Moreover, lecturers have needs just like any other human being; when those needs are not met, it becomes a challenge. And in this case, lecturers will take leaving their current employer as the solution to their challenge. Other participants had this to say about the benefits being offered by the university:

HR3: "And also, some get better offers elsewhere. So, you know how money is. People will always go for more money."

Therefore, lecturers who get a better offer from another university tend to resign and join the other university because of a higher salary. In turn, the lecturer will be able to afford the ever-increasing standard of living.

Other participants mentioned the benefits that the university is currently offering the lecturers and other employees:

HR2: "When your spouse dies, you get money. When your child who is below 21 years old passes on, you get money."

HR2: "Even when I pass on, my children will still benefit from the study benefits. Even if my husband wants to go to school, he can still study."

L5: "Bonus incentives such as birthdays."

HR1: "You can still use the study benefit even when you are a pensioner."

Basically, the above-mentioned clearly shows that the university in question is taking good care of its employees. Some of the benefits are as follows: financial assistance when a spouse or a child passes on and the study benefits for the spouse and the children of the employee. As a result, this shows that the university does not only care about its employees but also takes care of their immediate family members. Moreover, the university will provide a birthday bonus, and the study benefit does not only apply to the employed lecturer but also applies when the lecturer has retired. Therefore, the pensioners of this university will get a chance to continue with their studies. Even though most employees have stated that the salaries are lower compared to the other universities, the university provides other benefits that employees are grateful for and feel appreciated by the university.

Hence, literature indicates that when employees are offered less money compared to their colleagues, they tend to look for better-paying universities elsewhere (Masum et al., 2015). Hence, the reviewed literature does confirm that lower salaries do contribute towards lecturers leaving their current employer. The finding proved that the literature was correct in saying the lecturers will move to where the university is paying a higher salary than other universities.

4.1.2 Objective 1, theme 2: Physical working conditions

The physical workplace is the university's premises, where the employees will spend most of their time. As lecturers have confirmed, they spend more time at work than at home. However, Herzberg indicated that the conditions of the environment where you work contribute to an employee being satisfied with their job (Tai et al., 2021). Therefore, a conducive work environment is non-negotiable. Unfortunately, that is not the case for the university in question. Most employees have mentioned that the university is struggling to provide a conducive work environment for lecturers. And the contributions of the co-researchers are as follows:

AD4: "So some universities are privileged to be /have a lot of resources, which they can use to attract the individual academics to their own institution. So those are a combination of factors that are also a challenge for us to survive as a rural campus."

Hence, what is mentioned by this participant indicates that the university can do better than the current situation. In this case, the resources provided by the university in question are not good enough to attract lecturers to join the university. Instead, they push the current lecturers to look for universities that provide better resources to make the work environment conducive enough for teaching and learning.

HR1: "Then the external is basically either municipality issues."

L5: "Experiencing high load shedding and all the frustration it brings. The roads are not in good condition. And also there are no rehabilitation sites."

HR4: "Is the environment suitable for them? Would they be able to bring their families to be with them where they are going? That is another challenge."

Some participants shared their frustrations about the environment that the university is located in. As previously mentioned, the university in question is a rural university; therefore, the areas surrounding the university are not yet fully developed. That is, the simple basic needs of society are still lacking, and that on its own poses a lot of challenges not only for the employees but also for the students of the university. However, in this case, the focus is on the university lecturers in question. Since the municipality is faced with various challenges to developing the rural society, it simply means that other areas of development will suffer, and the people will suffer.

Therefore, the participants indicated that the dysfunctional municipality does not make it easy for them to stay for a longer period at this university. Moreover, the university does not provide accommodation for the lecturers, so lecturers and their families will have to stay in rural communities. In this case, it was indicated by the employees of this university that staying in these communities is challenging on its own. Since they are experiencing load shedding, that is not normal. In other words, three days with no electricity is normal. And also, it is not only the electricity issues but also the roads are full of potholes and that extends the commuting time. Hence, when the university hires a lecturer, they first come to this community without the whole family to familiarise themselves with this place. But most do not get to a point whereby all the family is relocated to this rural community because they are not used to this lifestyle.

Therefore, some lecturers do not mind working for the university in question, but they are not happy with the salaries. However, they did not complain about the benefits provided by the university for the lecturers. Instead, the lecturers and other staff members had the same challenge, i.e., the rural communities they have to reside in are not comfortable enough for them and their families and also, they are not used to this type of lifestyle where almost all the roads are full of potholes and are not maintained. As a result, lecturers find themselves searching for other jobs as soon as they start working for this university because they can see that they are not going to be able to relocate the whole family to a rural community.

It was found that the physical working conditions play a bigger role on whether the lecturers will continue, or one will find that there are poor working conditions and leave the university. According to the literature, university employees with no stable internet access found the workplace straining because they have to come up with means to personally pay for the Internet (Amegatsey et al., 2018). Hence, physical working conditions are discovered to form part of the challenges affecting lecturers' retention.

4.2 Internal and external challenges faced by lecturers

These sections responded to objective number one, and the following two themes emerged from the data: No stability and loss of interest at work.

4.2.1 Objective 2, theme 1: No stability

One of the areas that will be affected by the exit plan is stability within the workplace. And when a lecturer has insecurities with their job, then that is when challenges come up. In addition to the insecurities, the lecturer will panic in trying to look for greener pastures. It was also mentioned that all the panicking and searching for a job would put a strain on the lecturer, and one will not be able to fully focus on the present job (Newman et al., 2019). Moreover, a lecturer will avoid any

commitment of any nature due to serving a three-month notice. The research participants had this to add:

HR4: "Location, some people complain about the Location. It is far away from big cities, and there are certain services you do not get there. And because some come and realise the water situation, the electricity situation and then they leave. Some of it is because of the accommodation situation. Because most of the accommodation you find here is not like the regular accommodation you find in big cities."

The above participant indicated that the challenges of this community the university belongs to do not make it any easier for a lecturer to continue working for this university in question. Maybe, the institutional challenges and the ones faced by lecturers within the university premises can be adjusted so that the university can keep the hardworking lecturers. However, the challenge begins when lecturers have to go home to the community the university is located in. Because the university is a rural campus, and so is the community. In other words, some of the basic needs may not be provided by the municipality in charge. One of the mentioned services that may be lacking is that the municipality fails to provide the citizens with clean drinking water, and sometimes nothing is coming out of the taps. Also, the municipality fails to provide electricity on a regular basis. Some areas go for a month without electricity or explanation of the problem.

The university in question does not provide accommodation for the staff members, including the lecturers, and that means every staff member will have to search for accommodation within the same community that is struggling with basic needs such as the supply of clean water on a normal basis. Most lecturers complain that the type of accommodation that they find within the community does not meet the normal standard of accommodation they get in big cities. Therefore, these municipal issues and the fact that the university is based in a rural area do not make it easy for the lecturers to find stability and stay longer at this particular university. Instead, as soon as they realise the current issues, they search for greener pastures in an environment that has nothing in common with the rural campus.

HR3: "Maybe family, you understand. Having to migrate all your family here is a task, and the commuting back and forth from wherever they come from might be a problem, so they decide it is not worth it."

Some participants have indicated that most lecturers are from cities and have their families based in cities. So, when one finds a job in a rural campus, one will assume that when there are already existing lecturers, one will also be able to cope. But all the commuting from the big cities to the rural areas every time they want to be with family is exhausting. Then, when one decides to look for a place so that the whole family can migrate and they face the rural community and municipal challenges mentioned, the lecturer does not see any other option than to go back to the city and leave the current employer.

L6: "So, you know where they go, they eat continental dishes. Get to meet people from different cultures. That could also be an aspect they will consider, that if I move from this Location, I will not be able to get this lifestyle."

Another co-researcher even went as far as to make it clear that there are many benefits when lecturers are not working in a rural environment; hence, when they are pressed for a choice, they are more likely to choose the universities in the cities than the ones in rural environments. In this situation, there would not be many places to dine out in a rural environment; even if there are, they will probably provide the local cuisine. Therefore, the lecturer would find stability at the workplace where continental dishes are served and they get to meet people from different cultures. Hence, when lecturers do not find it easy to migrate the whole family to the rural environment, they remain unstable until they find a university to migrate the whole family to that area.

As a result, when lecturers lack a sense of stability for themselves and their families, they find it hard to continue working in that environment. In this case, with the issues of water and electricity, it is

difficult for the lecturer to work from home on weekends because one will have to be on campus to access electricity and water. Therefore, when lecturers get an opportunity to work in an environment where they will not struggle with water and electricity, they grab it with both hands and never let go. And that leaves the rural campus with vacant lecturer positions to fill on a normal basis.

Therefore, the study holds that a level of uncertainty creates instability for lecturers, which is enough reason for them to continue searching for greener pastures. Furthermore, the literature confirmed that factors such as a temporary contract provide some degree of discomfort, especially towards the termination of the contract (Newman et al., 2019).

4.2.2 Objective 2, theme 2: Loss of interest at work

When they say, “when it rains, it pours,” they probably mean what happens to lecturers looking for greener pastures elsewhere. They tend to lose the interest they once had in their job. This is simply because they are forever searching for greener pastures and are not fully focused on the work. Ultimately, the quality of work produced by the lecturers will deteriorate if one or even more lecturers lose interest in their jobs. Sometimes, lecturers lose interest in their work because they are not given an opportunity to teach in the area of specialisation of their choice (Mayya et al., 2020). Interest in the work that one does plays a major role. In terms of an employee's needs, when interest in the job is lost, it becomes easy for the lecturer not to be motivated to continue working at a place they are not interested in. Participants had this to add as to why lecturers lose interest in the work they do:

HR2: “Le ho re motho o tlwaetse ho dula Gauteng, jwale this place e mo tlela hanyane. Dikolo tsa mona, bana ba hae ha ba ya tlwaela lifestyle ya mona. Wa utlwa.”

Translation: HR2: “It becomes a challenge, especially when a lecturer comes from the Gauteng province, because they are used to a certain lifestyle, so it is not easy to adapt to the new environment. And also, the available schools in the rural environment are not up to the standard that the lecturer and the children are used to.”

Therefore, the lecturer and the family find it difficult to adapt to the new environment because it has nothing in common with the previous one. Because the current employer is located in a rural environment, in a place where development still needs to take place, it becomes challenging for the lecturer to adapt to the new environment. Hence, as soon as a lecturer realises that the rural environment is not for them, they start losing interest in their work and look for greener pastures.

L6: “One of the challenges of staying that side is water or service delivery. You can imagine not having water regularly. The load shedding off campus seems more severe than in other areas. And, of course, transport-related issues.”

AD4: “So our physical location makes it a little bit hard.”

Other participants continued to indicate that even when one is in love with their work, they lose interest because of the other factors that affect their well-being as a whole. On the one hand, the physical location of the campus is a challenge on its own and makes it difficult for some lecturers to continue working for the university. In other words, lecturers come to this rural campus determined to work but once they get to this rural environment, they lose interest in the work itself because all they want to do is leave.

Staying in a rural environment affects a lecturer's interest towards their work because sometimes, after work, one wants to continue with a certain research project, but it becomes complicated because of the water cuts and the abnormal load shedding. This means the lecturer will spend most time at home collecting and storing water in the dark and unable to work because of the constant power

cuts. Therefore, when all the above-mentioned continues, it leads to a loss of interest in their work, and lecturers end up focusing all their energy on searching for a job in an area that is not rural.

L4: "No structures for the well-being of, the psychological well-being of the lecturers as the workload is very high, and they work for long hours."

One lecturer complained that due to the very high workload, lecturers have to deal with the strain the workload puts on them. Yet, the university is not doing anything about providing psychological help to assist lecturers in dealing with the workload. The increasing workload is a result of other lecturers who left the university, and now the current lecturers will have to take over some duties and responsibilities of the lecturer who left and that becomes too much for the lecturers who are left behind, especially without psychological help from the university. Therefore, when lecturers face such challenges, they tend to look for work at universities where they believe they will not have a high workload.

AD2: "Somebody who does not know what you are doing would not know the value you are adding to the system."

Managers who do not pay attention to the subordinates' hard work do more harm than good because lecturers lose interest in their work. As a result of the manager not paying attention to the lecturers' work, the lecturer loses interest because whether they do well or not, it makes no difference because the manager is not paying attention. Therefore, when the manager has no idea of the input or the lecturer's hard work, it demotivates the lecturer to continue working hard. Eventually, the lecturer ends up losing interest in the current job and starts searching for a new job, hoping to get a better manager who will care enough to notice a job well done and appreciate and congratulate one accordingly.

Losing interest in the work that one does is a challenge because it affects the overall performance of the lecturers. Even if one was one of the top researchers, when managers do not recognise the work that one does, it demotivates one, and one would want to work where they are recognised and appreciated more. Hence, lecturers will look for another employer where they will feel appreciated.

It was shown that lecturers lose interest in work because of their environment, in this case, the rural community in which the university is situated. In addition, when lecturers do not form part of the decision-making team, it discourages them from voicing their opinions, and as it continues, they lose interest in work (Mayya et al., 2020). Therefore, loss of interest at work can cause the lecturer to look for greener pastures elsewhere.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The research explored challenges influencing lecturers' retention in a South African university and found that salaries and, benefits, physical working conditions are institutional challenges towards retaining its lecturers, while factors such as lack of stability and loss of interest at work are internal and external challenges affecting lecturers' retention in their workplace. Based on the findings, it can be concluded that institutional and personal challenges contribute to lecturers' retention in South African universities. The institutional challenges, such as salaries, benefits, and physical working conditions, are within the control of the university administration, and addressing them can help retain more lecturers. On the other hand, personal challenges such as lack of stability and loss of interest at work are more complex and require individual attention from the lecturers themselves.

Based on the conclusion that it is important for universities to understand and address challenges faced by lecturers in order to create a positive and supportive environment, here are two recommendations:

- Develop and implement programs and initiatives that support lecturers' well-being and professional development: Universities should create programs that help lecturers manage their workload, provide support for their personal and professional development, and encourage a healthy work-life balance. This can be achieved through mentorship programs, professional development opportunities, and policies that allow for flexible working arrangements.
- Foster a culture of open communication and transparency: Universities should encourage open, honest communication between lecturers and management. This can be achieved through regular feedback sessions, opportunities for lecturers to voice their concerns and suggestions, and creating a culture that values and rewards input from all academic community members. By fostering an open and supportive culture, universities can create an environment that encourages lecturers to stay and contribute to the academic community.

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