**Why they stay: A Sociocultural Reconstruction of Academics’ Retention in Uganda’s Public Universities**

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**Abstract**

Conventional Human Resources literature influenced by organizational literature on job retention has argued that people are attracted to stay on the job because of institutional incentives such as attractive pay and benefits, conducive working environment among others. However, this orthodox view is being questioned by alternative perspectives which postulate that retention goes beyond the institutional issues to include sociocultural aspects of the context. This study sought to investigate the gaps associated with the orthodox model and to find out to what extent and why people might continue to stay in spite of the conditions on the job. This study focused on academics and was guided by two research questions namely: “To what extent do academics stay working in Uganda’s Public Universities despite unappealing working conditions?” and also “Why do the academics stay and what sociocultural dynamics reflect their retention in the public universities?

To address these questions, a mixed methods sequential explanatory design comprising a quantitative phase (quan) that led into the qualitative (QUAL) phase was utilized. A cross sectional survey was utilized in the quantitative phase to examine research question one while a narrative inquiry approach was used for research question two. The study indicates that (93%) academic respondents have intentions of staying despite unappealing working conditions among public universities. A social constructionist analysis of academics’ narratives of their job embeddedness resulted in three explanatory themes for their stay namely: meaning, social relations and otherness. Thus, the 11 academics’ stories revealed the meaning academics attach to their job derived from academics’ professional identity stories, the social relations from engaged scholarship stories and the otherness embedded in perceptions of external prestige stories all of which reflect the sociocultural dynamics of academics’ stay in the public universities. The study concludes that retention is a social construction that should be based on a narrative inquiry of the human lives, stories and experiences as opposed to institutional frameworks.