

Perceived Prestige and Status as Predictors of Staff Retention in Federal Universities within Niger Delta Region of Nigeria

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Abstract: The study examined the effect of perceived prestige and perceived status on staff retention among academic and non-academic staff in federal universities in Niger Delta region of Nigeria and the moderating effect of job role on these relationships to provide evidence for improving staff retention in higher education. **Prior work**. Previous studies on staff retention in Nigerian universities have mainly focused on economic and organisational factors such as compensation, job satisfaction and career development, with relatively little attention to symbolic factors, such as perceived prestige and status. The current study fills this gap by investigating the effect of these symbolic factors on staff retention. **Methodology**. A quantitative cross-sectional survey design was used. Data were collected through structured questionnaires administered to 378 academic and non-academic staff drawn from nine federal universities in the Niger Delta region. Descriptive statistics, correlation, regression, and moderation analyses were used to analyse the data. **Results:** The findings revealed that perceived prestige and perceived status significantly and positively predict staff retention. Perceived prestige was a stronger predictor of academic staff retention whereas perceived status was relatively more important for non-academic staff. The relationship between perceived prestige, perceived status and the staff retention was significantly moderated by job role. **Practical implications:** University management should improve recognition systems, provide fair opportunities for career progression and develop transparent performance management systems to improve staff commitment and retention. **Value:** The study adds to the higher education and organisational behaviour literature by demonstrating the importance of symbolic recognition, in addition to traditional factors in staff retention, and by emphasising the moderating impact of job role on staff retention.

Keywords: Perceived Prestige; Perceived Status; Staff retention; Academic and Non-Academic Staff

1. Introduction

Retaining staff in Nigerian universities has become a major concern as academic and non-teaching staff intend to turnover because of poor working conditions, low salaries/wages, limited personal career development opportunities, weak institutional support systems and several others (Gbenu,

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2013). These dynamics erode staff morale, productivity and organisational cohesion, leading to continuing staff shortages and operational disruptions in higher education. Studies have identified that improper retention strategies are associated with reduced sustainable performance and institutional outcomes in Nigerian public universities (Salau et al, 2021; Wogwu, 2026). Furthermore, there is an over-arching finding that employees in some of the public universities become disengaged from their work as a result of unstable work environment, delay in payment of salary and lack of appreciation. These lead to staff turnover, making retention more difficult (Abiola & Ajibade, 2025). These concerns underscore the importance of identifying psychosocial determinants, like perceived prestige or status, that could influence staff decisions to stay at or leave their institutions. Perceived prestige and status refer to the extent to which employees believe that their job position is worthy of societal recognition, respect, or cultural value as well as how organisational commitment and intentions to leave can be influenced (Obianuju et al., 2023).

Most existing research on staff retention in Nigerian higher education has generally focused on structural and management issues. These include issues like pay, training opportunities, and overall job satisfaction (Abiola & Ajibade, 2025; Abiodun-Oyebanji & Olatunji, 2023; Wogwu, 2026). Though these determinants are certainly crucial, an exclusive focus on them leaves out the role of symbolic and psychosocial predictors, such as perceived prestige and status, in shaping employees' decisions to stay or exit their organisations. The persistent neglect of these symbolic dimensions constitutes a significant gap within retention studies, especially within the Nigerian context. In academic settings where professional recognition and intellectual repute are very important, perceived prestige and status of different job functions may be crucial factors in keeping workers (Salau et al., 2021; Wogwu, 2026). Professional hierarchies and cultural status symbols exert considerable influence on workplace conduct. Addressing this deficiency is essential for developing comprehensive retention strategies. Such strategies should not only address employees' fundamental requirements but also enhance their perceptions of recognition, belonging, and professional self-esteem.

The study seeks to examine the extent to which perceived prestige and perceived status influence employees' intention to remain or leave their academic institutions. To this end, the study has three specific objectives: (1) It seeks to investigate the extent to which perceived prestige predicts staff retention in federal universities in Nigeria. (2) It aims at finding out how perceived status influences staff retention; and (3) It is concerned with testing the combined impact of perceived prestige and status on staff retention amongst university staff. These objectives correspond to the research questions that examine the predictive relationship between perceived prestige, perceived status, and staff retention.

1.1. Scope of Study

The study is limited to academic and non-academic staffs in federal universities, since this group constitutes the largest workforce involved in teaching, research, and administration of university operations. With the focus on federal universities, however, it provides a relevant setting for examining retention issues since these institutions operate under similar governance structures, employments policies and funding systems under the Nigerian higher education system (Enobun-Nwidi & Hannatu, 2025). By examining the two groups of staff, a thorough understanding of how perceptions of prestige and status influence retention decisions in different work roles within the university setting is obtained.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Staff Retention in Higher Education Institutions

Staff retention has emerged as a collective challenge in higher education institutions around the world, particularly as evident in developing nations where nascent universities struggle to sustain themselves due to hurdles such as insufficient funding and lack of expertise. In the final analysis, it will be difficult to maintain stability and continue research productivity in the absence of a coherent and experienced workforce capable of performing their duties in relation to highly skilled educators. The education system in Nigeria exemplifies feudalism, a system of patronage, dependency and very little upward movement for the many where unequal access, regional inequality and elite concentration of quality education predominate. Consequently, individuals pursue a career in teaching for two primary reasons: either their family support this endeavour, or they feel compelled to utilise others' financial resources. Under these circumstances, it is not easy to attract talent in an institution with unfavourable income levels, inadequate promotion opportunities, limited social recognition, and a fluctuating work condition. Undoubtedly, these problems leave Nigerian academic and non-academic staff alike with deep discontents (Ajibade et al., 2025).

Researchers have recently emphasised that staff retention rates are linked with such things as satisfaction with one's work and a real engagement in what one does. For instance, research on the impact of economic instability and inadequate funding faced by Nigeria's public universities has shown that both academic and non-academic staff morale declines while many more intend to quit. Scores of Nigerian universities continue to witness a major reduction in staff numbers owing to this phenomenon of modern skilled academics moving abroad invariably for higher pays and perks (Ajibade et al., 2025; Lawal, 2025). These trends highlight the pressing need for institutions to identify the factors that can bolster employees' commitment and long-term retention.

2.2. Determinants of Staff Retention

A number of factors are highlighted in the literature regarding staff retention in higher education institutions. Traditionally, factors such as salary, promotion opportunities, training, job satisfaction and organisational support have overwhelmingly occupied scholars' attention because they are structural or managerial. Career development opportunities, mentoring programmes and structured training have a significant effect on employees' willingness to stay in an organisation because they promote professional growth and lead to job commitment (Marozva et al., 2024). The same applies to reward systems, including salary increases and promotion opportunities, which have been shown to increase organisational effectiveness and motivate employees to remain in university institutions (Okwuise & Uzoechina, 2023).

A second commonly cited reason influencing retention is job satisfaction. The positive sense of a helpful and fulfilling work environment can foster organisational commitment among employees, motivating them to remain with the organisation. Scholarly research conducted in higher education contexts indicates that characteristics such as leadership support, recognition, and the quality of interpersonal interactions are positively correlated with employee happiness and retention (Szostek, 2019; Muttalib et al., 2023; Bulińska-Stangrecka & Bagieńska, 2021). On the other hand, bad management practices and insufficient acknowledgement might erode employees' emotional connections with their organisations and prompt them to depart.

In spite of these insights, however, the majority of existing work has focused almost exclusively on material or economic factors influencing retention, and relatively less on symbolic or psychological facets of work such as prestige and status. However, these factors can have a strong impact on how employees perceive their professional values and identity in the workplace.

2.3. Perceived Prestige and Status in the Workplace

Perceived prestige refers to the degree of respect, admiration and social value attached to a particular profession or organisational role (Obianuju et al., 2023). In the academy, prestige can relate to things like intellectual credit and esteem, professional rank and prominence, academic autonomy and power along with social deference to scholarly work. Employees who feel that their employment are more prestigious may be more committed and less likely to leave if they have support of the organisation. Perceived status relates to the hierarchical position of an employee within a company and how well the organisation recognises them. Status influences the way people view their significance, power, and influence in working life (Liu et al., 2021). In university settings, there are often differences in status (between academic and non-academic staff, as well between professional ranks). These perceptions can influence employees' approach to their work and their desire to be in the workplace as part of that organisation. Lack of recognition creates disengagement in employees, and if workers feel their contributions are underappreciated, their motivation and commitment become low and this can lead to burnout & turnover.

Symbolic factors such as prestige and status are increasingly considered important predictors of employee attitudes and behaviours in organisational behaviour research. In doing so, these influence employees' sense of belonging, their organisational identity and their professional self-esteem. Therefore, considering prestige and status in tandem with more conventional retention factors, may offer a more holistic insight into the influences of staff retention in higher education institutions

2.4. Staff Retention in Nigerian Federal Universities

In the Nigerian system, failure to retain qualified university personnel has been exacerbated by systemic issues like scarcity of funds, absence of basic research facilities and infrastructure, and policy inconsistency. Many public universities have been affected by recurrent industrial actions and constraints on administration, which over the years, disrupted academic activities as well as diminished employee satisfaction (Addo et al., 2025; Salau et al., 2022). Moreover, the high growth trajectory of Nigerian higher education has led to competition for qualified academic manpower and made it increasingly difficult for institutions, over time, to retain that expertise internally. New evidence may suggest that Nigeria has reached alarming levels of academic staff replacement problems, with vacant university positions not being taken up or replaced as older professors retire. The shortage of researchers currently affected teaching quality, research output and the overall global competitiveness of Nigerian universities (Dada et al., 2023; Lawal, 2025). This has led to an increasing recognition that retaining experienced workers involves more than simply offering higher wages and better perks. It also requires awareness of the psychological and organisational frameworks underpinning their engagement at work.

2.5. Job Role as a Moderator in Retention Models

Although current researches do not primarily concentrate on job role type moderation, results suggest that there are role-based disparities in how factors affecting work influence retention. For example, teachers' turnover intentions are influenced by their work experience and alternative job opportunities, like variables that frequently correlate with a person's occupation (role) and seniority. Hence, role-linked experiences can reshape retention dynamics (Ibrahim et al., 2024). This corresponds with studies in the HRM literature, which found that different levels of organisational support and perceived career benefits have supported or suppressed effects on retention outcomes depending on employee group characteristics. Although not explicitly addressing academic versus non-academic roles, these studies noticed that role tethered traits such as career advancement opportunities or job grade, may affect the variable impact of perceptions on retention behaviours (Onur et al., 2024).

2.6. Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study illustrates the hypothesised relationship between perceived prestige and perceived status as independent factors and staff retention as the dependent variable within the context of Federal universities in Nigeria. Cropanzano et al. (2021) and Marozva et al. (2024) found out that if employees perceive their jobs as respected and socially valuable and meaningful in the context of organisations and society, they are likely to strengthen organisational commitment and persist with such jobs. Within the university context, prestige is tied to professional recognition and respect, academic reputation, and social consideration for one's role. Status refers to perceived hierarchies of workplace power within particular job roles. These symbolic expectations influence the attitudes, motivation and retention intention of the employees (Onwubuya et al., 2026) Hence, greater prestige and status should positively impact on retention of both academic and non-teaching staff.

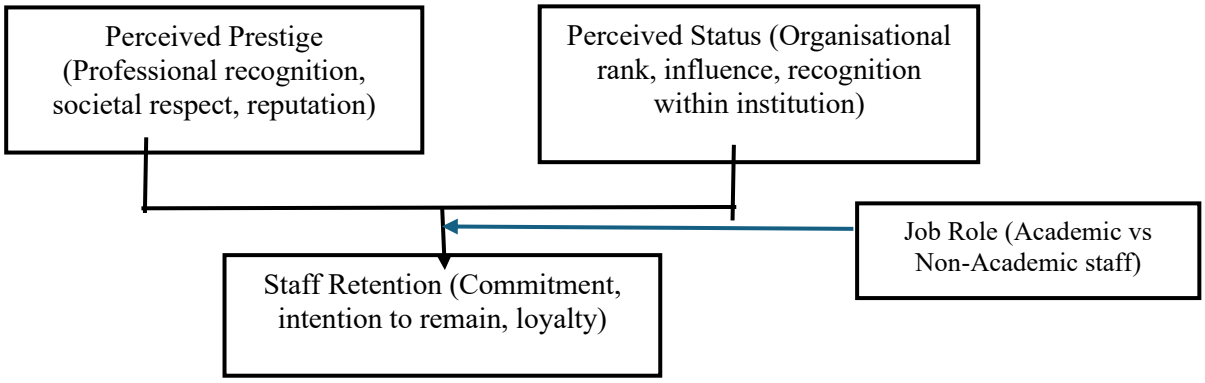


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework Diagram

The suggested framework posits that perceptions of prestige and status directly influence employee retention via employment type, satisfaction with collaborative efforts, sense of belonging, workplace involvement, trust, and social connectivity. Organisational commitment and retention of employees increase when there is an institutional recognition of socially valued roles amongst employees. These symbolic factors, thus serve as psychological motivators of retention behaviour.

2.7. Theoretical Framework

This study is guided by two theoretical perspectives: Social Exchange Theory (SET) and Status Characteristics Theory (SCT).

a) Social Exchange Theory: Social Exchange Theory views organisational-member relationships as a series of reciprocal exchanges of benefits and obligations. When workers feel their firm supplies them with the benefits, recognition, and support that are useful to them, they will tend to respond with loyalty and commitment (Cropanzano et al., 2021).

With regards to staff retention, employees stay with organisations when they experience positive exchanges, such as fair treatment, recognition, and growth opportunities in their career. On the other hand, when employees feel that their contributions are not recognised by the organisation, they may act in ways that reduce their commitment and eventually leave. As such, perceived prestige and status can be seen in the context as symbolic rewards involved with social exchange. Employees that are respected and valued within their institutions tend to have a longstanding level of commitment towards the organization.

b) Status Characteristics Theory: According to Status Characteristics Theory, social hierarchies impact people's behaviours, expectations and interactions in organisations. The theory offers the initial explanation of how status differences among participants contribute to the formation of hierarchical structures of power and prestige within task groups (Berger et al., 1971; Simpson & Walker, 2002). The idea is that, as the employee goes higher up in the organisational hierarchy, the more acknowledgement, power and access the individual have within organisations. These benefits cement their loyalty to the organisation and increase their job satisfaction.

Within the university context, this divergence in status may be due to the academic hierarchy, the influence of the administration, the professional credentials needed for various jobs, and/or the social prestige that comes with certain jobs. Such differences impact on employees' perceptions about their worth in the organisation and may shape their retention decisions.

This study combines Status Characteristics Theory with Social Exchange Theory, offering a broad perspective of how perceived prestige and status affect staff retention within higher education institutions.

2.8. Empirical Review

Some of the empirical studies have tried to understand what can influence staff retention in higher education establishments. Ajibade et al. (2025) conducted a study on employee engagement and retention in public universities in Nigeria. This study highlighted the necessity of organisational support along with recognition as significant factors influencing employees' intention to stay in their institutions. Similarly, it was discovered that organisational advancements and training opportunities are strongly linked with staff retention in tertiary institutions, fostering professional progress and enhancing job satisfaction (Nanle & Nnorom, 2021). Marozva et al. (2024) examined academic staff retention, identifying professional recognition, development possibilities, and a supportive work environment as significant factors influencing employee retention. Again, Jacob et al. (2021) investigated workforce challenges in Nigerian universities and determined that institutional recognition and professional respect have a significantly positive impact on employees' organisational commitment.

While a number of studies have been conducted on factors relating to staff retention in higher education institutions, the majority of these explorations are primarily limited to structural variables (such as pay, promotion and job satisfaction). The role of symbolic factors like perceived prestige and status as drivers of retention decisions among university employees remains under-explored. There have been very minimal empirical study specifically addressing collegiate employment retention, despite the fact that many aspects of employee relations in academia are highly similar to those in other industries. This variation is especially pronounced in studies focusing mainly on Nigerian federal universities due to the extent recognition and social worth between academic and non-academic positions might significantly affect employees' commitment and retention.

Thus, this study is a contribution to existing literature by exploring perceived prestige and perceived status as antecedents of staff retention in federal universities in Nigeria. This enhances the retention framework by integrating these symbolic variables with psychological and social factors that drive employee decisions.

2.9. Research Gap

While there is more literature on retention of staff in higher education, much research has focused on economic and managerial considerations such as salary, training opportunities, and job satisfaction. Although these variables matter, they are insufficient in explaining employees' psychological attachment to their organisations.

Literature exploring symbolism factors like perceived prestige and status, particularly among Nigerian universities, is sorely underdeveloped. However, these factors may be integral to shaping employees' professional identity, organisational commitment and retention decisions.

In addition, this topic has been limited to many existing studies examining mainly academic staff without considering the role of non-academic employees whose work is also essential to the university's administration and institutional activity. Consequently, this study fills these gaps by testing perceived prestige and perceived status in relation to staff retention both academic and non-academic staff of federal universities in Nigeria.

2.10. Research Questions

Given the problem stated in this study, the following research questions are raised:

a) To what extent does perceive prestige predict staff retention?

b) To what extent does perceived status predict staff retention in federal universities in Nigeria?

c) What is the combined effect of perceived prestige and perceived status on staff retention?

d) Does job role moderate the relationship between perceived prestige, perceived status, and staff retention?

2.11. Hypotheses

The following hypotheses are linked to the study on staff retention in federal universities.

H_{01}: Perceived prestige does not significantly predict staff retention in federal universities.

H_{02}: Perceived status does not make significant contributions to staff retention in federal universities.

H_{03}: Perceived prestige and perceived status do not jointly predict staff retention in federal universities in Nigeria.

3. Methodology

The study employed a quantitative descriptive cross-sectional survey design to determine how perceived prestige and status predict staff retention in federal universities in Nigeria, with job role as a moderating variable. Because a survey allows gathering standardised data from a large population and enables statistical analysing of relationships among variables, the design was determined to be appropriate. The population included academic and non-academic staff of nine selected federal universities with an aggregate staff strength of 34,306, compiled by the researcher from records of Federal Ministry of Education (Federal Ministry of Education, 2017; Wogwu, 2026). Using the Taro Yamane formula, a total sample size of 378 was determined, with a precision level of 5%. This sample size was then proportionately dispersed to a stratified sample of all the universities represented, ensuring that both staff categories were appropriately represented. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire based on five-point Likert scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The instrument assesses perceived prestige, perceived status, job role and staff retention. Experts in educational management and Human Resources Management evaluated the instrument for face and content validity by looking at how clear, relevant, and comprehensive the items were. Their suggestions were incorporated to improve the questionnaire. The study found that a Content Validity Index (CVI) of 0.80 was satisfactory and acceptable. Using Cronbach's alpha, it was also found that all constructs had coefficients above 0.70, which showed that the instrument was reliable and had good internal consistency. The questionnaire was distributed electronically to respondents and responses were retrieved for analysis electronically as well.

Table 1 shows that the total population was obtained by adding the academic and non-academic staff from each of the selected universities.

Table 1. Proportional Distribution of the Sample Size (378) Across Selected Federal Universities

S/N	University	Population (Ni)	Calculation	Sample Size
1	University of Calabar (UNICAL)	6,278	(6,278/34,306) × 378	69
2	University of Uyo (UNIUYO)	3,797	(3,797/34,306) × 378	42
3	University of Port Harcourt (UNIPORT)	4,365	(4,365/34,306) × 378	48
4	Niger Delta University (NDU)	3,416	(3,416/34,306) × 378	38
5	University of Benin (UNIBEN)	7,498	(7,498/34,306) × 378	83
6	Federal University of Petroleum Resources Effurun (FUPRE)	710	(710/34,306) × 378	8
7	Michael Okpara University of Agriculture Umudike (MOUAU)	2,802	(2,802/34,306) × 378	31

8	Federal University Otuoke (FUOTUOKE)	2,333	(2,333/34,306) × 378	26
9	Federal University of Technology Owerri (FUTO)	3,107	(3,107/34,306) × 378	33
	Total	**34,306**		**378**

Note: Values were rounded to the nearest whole number

Source: Compiled by the Researcher from Records of Federal Ministry of Education (2026)

Proportional representation of the 378 respondents to the nine universities means that this sample is sufficiently representative of the target population in terms of its structure. Thus, enabling meaningful analysis with regard to perceived prestige, perceived status and staff retention by university staff.

4. Data Analysis Method

Data analysis was conducted using descriptive and inferential statistical methods. The bio-data of the respondents was summarised, and the general pattern of responses to the study variables was analysed using descriptive statistics (frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation). These measures summarised the dispersion and central tendency of perceived prestige, perceived status, job role, and staff retention. Inferential statistics were employed to assess the research hypotheses and the predictive relationships among the variables under investigation. Specifically, the stepwise multiple regression analysis was also carried out to identify the predictive capacity of perceived prestige and perceived status in determining staff retention. Furthermore, moderation in the relationship between the independent variables and staff retention was assessed with hierarchical regression analysis. All analyses were carried out with Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), statistical significance was set according to 0.05. This type of analysis allowed the study to ascertain both the magnitude of the associations of study variables and their significance, leading to valid conclusions.

5. Results Presentation and Discussions

5.1. Results

Data Analysis in this section involves data collected from 378 academic and non-academic staff of selected federal universities in Nigeria's Niger Delta. Results are organised according to the research questions and hypotheses used in this study. Descriptive and regression analysis were conducted to explore the relationships between perceived prestige, perceived status and retention of staff using the SPSS.

Descriptive Statistics Analysis of Respondents' Bio-Data

The descriptive statistics (frequency and percentage distributions) of the bio-data of respondents were computed using the dataset (N = 378 respondents). This analysis serves the dual purpose of describing demographic characteristics of respondents and investigating whether sample represents the study population adequately (Creswell & Creswell, 2021; Saunders et al., 2022).

Table 2. Distribution of Sample Demographics

1. Gender Distribution of Respondents		
Gender	**Frequency**	**Percentage (%)**
Female	190	50.3

Male	185	48.9
Prefer not to say	3	0.8
Total	378	100
2. Age Distribution of Respondents		
Age Group	**Frequency**	**Percentage (%)**
31–40 years	85	22.5
41–50 years	128	33.9
51–60 years	97	25.7
61–70 years	63	16.7
Others (minor entry variations)	5	1.2
Total	378	100
3. Job Role of Respondents		
Job Role	**Frequency**	**Percentage (%)**
Academic Staff	189	50.0
Non-Academic Staff	189	50.0
Total	378	100
4. Years of Service		
Years of Service	**Frequency**	**Percentage (%)**
5–10 years	94	24.9
11–15 years	148	39.2
Above 15 years	136	36.0
Total	378	100
5. Highest Educational Qualification		
Qualification	**Frequency**	**Percentage (%)**
PhD	165	43.7
Master's Degree (MSc/MA)	103	27.3
Bachelor's Degree (BSc/BA)	80	21.2
ND/NCE/Diploma/HND/MBA	30	7.8
Total	378	100

Source: Researchers' Computation based on data collected (2026)

Participants were stratified by gender, age, job function, years in service and education level, as presented in Table 2. The demographic detail showed that 50.3% (190) and 48.9% (185) of participants were females and males respectively, while 0.8% (3) did not report their gender. This indicates that the gender spread of study subjects was quite equal. In terms of the age distribution, 33.9% (128) were aged 41–50 years, followed by those who were aged 51–60 years (25.7%) and those aged 31–40 years (22.5%). This means that most respondents met the expectations of being midway through their careers with enough experience to respond appropriately.

In addition, job role distribution shows equal representation of academic and non-academic staff (50% each), thus allowing the experiences across staff categories to stand on an equal footing. The majority of participants reported 11–15 years (39.2%) of experience, or over 15 years (36.0%), meaning that respondents had sufficient institutional knowledge. In terms of educational qualification, the majority were PhD holders (43.7%); while master's degree holders comprised 27.3% and bachelor's degree holders constituted 21.2%. This demonstrates that respondents were educated, increasing the reliability of responses. In summary, the demographic distribution shows that the sample was heterogeneous, seasoned and adequate for analysing personnel retention in federal universities.

Research Question 1: To what extent does perceived prestige predict staff retention in federal universities in Nigeria?

Hypothesis 1 (H_{01}): Perceived prestige does not significantly predict staff retention in federal universities in Nigeria.

Table 3. Descriptive Analysis for RQ1: Perceived Prestige and Staff Retention

Items (Perceived Prestige)	N	Mean	Std. Deviation (SD)	Decision
PP1	378	3.68	1.08	High
PP2	378	3.72	1.04	High
PP3	378	3.65	1.10	High
PP4	378	3.74	1.02	High
PP5	378	3.71	1.05	High
PP6	378	3.70	1.07	High
Cluster Mean	**378**	**3.70**	**1.06**	**High Extent**

Table 3 suggests that perceived prestige is a high driver of staff retention (cluster mean above the 3.50 benchmark). Given that the mean scores were uniformly high for all items, it indicates respondents generally feel recognised, valued and socially acknowledged within their institutions. This means that prestige plays an important role in determining federal universities employees' intention to remain. This outcome could also be explained by the effect of professional recognition, institutional prestige, and social worth attached to university jobs which promote belongingness, motivation and commitment for employees or channels through which employees may execute their retention intentions amicably.

Table 4. Regression Result for Perceived Prestige and Staff Retention

Variable	*Beta (β)*	*t-value*	*Sig. (p)*
Perceived Prestige	0.41	8.62	0.000

R	**0.58**
R^2	0.34
F-value	74.32
Sig.	0.000

Decision: Since $p < 0.05$, the null hypothesis is rejected.

Results in Table 4 showed that perceived prestige had a positive significant effect on retention of the staff. The regression coefficient ($\beta = 0.41$) indicates that perceived prestige added substantially to the variance in staff retention, suggesting that those whose roles are positively defined as respected and socially valued are more likely to stay with their institution. As indicated in the model summary, perceived prestige explained a significant proportion of variance towards staff retention; this reinforces the argument that prestige is an important predictor in order to keep employees in their organisation.

The significance value gained from the regression analysis in testing H_{01} (which states prestige does not predict staff retention significantly) was less than the 0.05 level of significance. This value led to the rejection of the null hypothesis. Thus, perceived prestige is a salient predictor of staff retention of both academic and non-academic staff in federal universities. This positive relationship suggests that an employee role that is both better recognised, respected professionally and of increasing institutional value correlates with a higher degree of willingness to commit to the university system as well as remain in it. This just shows the importance of symbolic recognition and professional reputation as key drivers behind retaining staff.

Research Question 2: To what extent does perceived status predict staff retention in federal universities in Nigeria?

Hypothesis 2 (H_{02}): Perceived status does not significantly predict staff retention in federal universities in Nigeria.

Table 5. Descriptive Analysis for RQ2: Perceived Status and Staff Retention

Items (Perceived Status)	N	Mean	Std. Deviation (SD)	Decision
PS1	378	3.71	0.72	High
PS2	378	3.76	0.69	High
PS3	378	3.73	0.71	High
PS4	378	3.75	0.68	High
PS5	378	3.77	0.70	High
PS6	378	3.72	0.71	High
Cluster Mean	378	**3.74**	**0.70**	**High Extent**

Table 5 presents a cluster mean of 3.74 for perceived status with the benchmark set at 3.50 and clearly see that it predicts a high level of staff retention (B). With all items attaining high mean scores, respondents appeared to perceive their organisational roles as regarded and able to make an influence. This indicates that perceived status is an important predictor of employees' turnover intention to continue working in federal universities. This may be due to the importance of hierarchy as an authorised recognition, professional influence, and integration in various decision-making processes regarding employability, increasing sense of worth, which increases motivation and attachment and reduces those employees leaving the organisation.

Table 6. Regression Result for Perceived Status and Staff Retention

Variable	*Beta (β)*	*t-value*	*Sig. (p)*
Perceived Status	0.36	7.44	0.000
	R	**0.54**	
	R²	0.29	
	F-value	61.18	
	Sig.	0.000	

Decision: Since $p < 0.05$, the null hypothesis is rejected.

Table 6 shows the Regression result of the extent to which perceived status predicts the retention of staff (academic vs. non-academic) in federal universities. The results demonstrated that perceived status has a positive and statistically significant effect on employee retention. In the table, regression coefficient $\beta = 0.36$; $t = 7.44$; $p \leq 0.000$ per less than the level of significance at $\alpha = 0.05\%$, implying that perceived status affects staff retention greatly. Furthermore, model summary indicates that the correlation coefficient $R = 0.54$ and coefficient of determination of $R^2 = 0.29$, suggesting that the value of the perceive status covers statistically significant variance of 29% in staff retention. The F-value 61.18 ($p = 0.000$) showed that the overall model was statistically significant. Because of these results, the null hypothesis H_{02} stating that perceived status does not greatly affect staff retention was rejected. This means that the workers perceive their positions to be recognised, influential and respected in the hierarchical structure of an organisation, which would make them stay longer with their institutions. The positive value of beta (β=0.36) indicates that as the perceived status increases so does staff retention among university employees. These findings align with Status Characteristics Theory in that when individuals are allocated higher status roles within organisations, they receive greater acclaim and sway and this further cement their commitment to the organisation (Berger et al., 1971).

Research Question 3: What is the combined effect of perceived prestige and perceived status on staff retention?

Hypothesis 3 (H_{03}): Perceived prestige and perceived status do not jointly predict staff retention in federal universities in Nigeria.

Table 7. Descriptive Analysis for RQ 3: Combined Effect of Perceived Prestige and Perceived Status on Staff Retention

Variable	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Decision
Perceived Prestige (PP)	378	3.70	1.06	High
Perceived Status (PS)	378	3.74	0.70	High
Staff Retention (SR)	378	3.47	1.07	Moderate
Combined Mean (PP & PS)	378	**3.72**	**0.88**	**High Extent**

The combined mean for the additive effect of perceived prestige and perceived status towards staff retention as illustrated in Table 7 is very high (mean=3.72) exceeding the benchmarked mean of 3.50. Perceived prestige (M = 3.70) and perceived status (M = 3.74) had high means while staff retention had a moderate mean (M = 3.47). This implies that the greater the acknowledgement of professional excellence as well as organisational repute visualised by employees, the higher their retention in the institution. The result may be due to prestige and status promoting employees' sense of value, identity, belongingness ultimately motivates better, giving a commitment towards organisation and also retaining themselves for long duration.

Table 8. Multiple Regression Result

Variable	*Beta (β)*	*t-value*	*Sig.*
Perceived Prestige	0.33	6.12	0.000
Perceived Status	0.29	5.48	0.000
R		*0.66*	
R^2		0.44	
Adjusted R^2		0.43	
F-value		98.65	
Sig.		0.000	

Decision: Since p < 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected.

The joint effect of perceived prestige and perceived status on staff retention is shown in Table 8 through multiple regression analysis. The findings show very strong prediction of staff retention for both perceived prestige and perceived status. Specifically, perceived prestige regression coefficient was β = 0.33 (t = 6.12, p = 0.000), meaning that it was a significant positive contributor to staff retention. Perceived status was also statistically significant (β = 0.29, t = 5.48, p = 0.000), indicating that when employees perceive themselves as attaining a higher institutional status on their campus this leads to an increase in retention of those staff members. The model summary shows a correlation coefficient of R = 0.66, meaning that there is a positive relationship between the independent variables and staff retention. The percentage of the variance in staff retention accounted for with perceived prestige and perception of status combined as predictors is significant (R^2 = 0.44), which when adjusted for additional but unaccounted factors, still applies to 43% of the examples used in this investigation (Adjusted R^2 = 0.43). Overall regression model was statistically significant at F-value 98.65, p = 0.000<0.05 level of significance.

Generally, this means that both perceived prestige and perceived status have a considerable positive effect on the retention staff of federal universities. Consequently, an employee is more likely to

continue at their workplace when they feel like their roles are appropriately respected and valued in the hierarchy of importance within the organisation.

Research Question 4: Does job role moderate the relationship between perceived prestige, perceived status, and staff retention?

Table 9. Descriptive Statistics of Key Variables

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Perceived Prestige (PP)	378	3.82	0.65	2.0	5.0
Perceived Status (PS)	378	3.74	0.70	1.8	5.0
Staff Retention (SR)	378	3.91	0.62	2.0	5.0
Job Role (Moderator)	378	—	—	—	—

Note: Job Role is categorical (Academic = 1, Non-academic = 2).

Specifically, descriptive statistics of the main variables used to test job role as a moderator between perceived prestige, perceived status and staff retention is found in Table 9. As can be observed in the Table, perceived prestige had a mean of 3.82 and standard deviation of 0.65, with a minimum value of 2.0 and maximum value of 5.0. This means that most respondents scored high on perceived prestige and perceived status also showed a relatively high mean value of 3.74 and standard deviation of 0.70, with minimum and maximum values of 1.8 and 5.0 respectively, indicating moderate to high perceptions of organisational status among respondents.

Most importantly, the highest mean value of staff retention (3.91) with a standard deviation of 0.62 and responses varying from 2.0 to 5.0 suggest that the level of adherence to keeping staff members within their institutions is generally strong among the respondents in this study population. Job role was added as the moderating variable but no mean and standard deviation were given because it is a categorical variable. The relatively high mean scores of perceptions and the low standard deviations for respondents in all responses signify that there was consistency between responses, and these variables are therefore appropriate to conduct further moderation analysis.

Table 10. Correlation Matrix

Variable	*PP*	*PS*	*SR*	*Job Role*
PP	1	.68**	.52**	.12*
PS	.68**	1	.49**	.10
SR	.52**	.49**	1	.15**
Job Role	.12*	.10	.15**	1

***p < 0.05, *p < 0.01*

The correlation matrix indicating the association between two constructs perceived prestige (PP) and perceived status (PS) among staff retention (SR) as well as job role are listed in Table 10. The analysis shows a high positive and significant correlation between perceived prestige and perceived status (r =.68), indicating that perceived prestige is positively related to the perception of status. Perceived prestige is also moderately positively correlated with staff retention (r =.52), confirming the prediction that employees who perceive more prestige are more likely to stay at their institutions. Again, perceived prestige is weakly but significantly related to occupational role (r =.12), suggesting small differences in perceived prestige between academic and non-academic staff. Perceived status also positively predicts staff retention (r =.49), indicating that employees with higher subjective status exhibit relatively stronger intentions to retain. But, the association between perceived status and job role is weak and not significant (r =.10), indicating that there were few differences by staff category. The findings also show that job role has a weak but statistically significant positive relationship with

staff retention (r =.15), suggesting that job role is correlated with variation in retention levels. Finally, the positive and significant inter-correlation among the variables lend support to conduct further regression and moderation analysis.

Table 11. Moderation Analysis (Job Role as Moderator)

Predictor	*B*	*SE*	*t*	*p*	*95% CI*
Perceived Prestige (PP)	0.35	0.06	5.83	.001	0.23, 0.47
Perceived Status (PS)	0.28	0.05	5.60	.001	0.18, 0.38
Job Role	0.22	0.10	2.20	.029	0.02, 0.42
PP × Job Role	0.09	0.04	2.25	.025	0.01, 0.17
PS × Job Role	0.07	0.03	2.00	.046	0.001, 0.14
R^2	0.38	—	—	—	—
ΔR^2 (interaction)	0.03	—	—	.025	—

As seen in Table 11, the result of the moderation analysis shows whether job role moderates the relationship between perceived prestige and perceived status on staff retention. The results show that perceived prestige has a significant effect on staff retention (β = 0.35, Standard Error (SE) = 0.06, t = 5.83, p =0.001). This means that as perceived prestige increases; so also, will staff retention. The perceived status also significantly predicts staff retention (β = 0.28, SE = 0.05, t= 5.60, p = 0.001); that is, those people who believe they hold high status will have greater retention within the organisation.

The results also suggest that job role has a significant direct effect on employee retention (β = 0.22, SE = 0.10, t = 2.20, p = 0.029), which means that differences in retentivity basically exist between different job roles. Even more importantly, the interaction term between perceived prestige and job role (PP × Job Role) is significant (β = 0.09, SE = 0.04, t = 2.25, p = 0.025), indicating that the relationship between prestige and turnover is moderated by job role. Similarly, the perceived status × Job Role interaction (PS × Job Role) is also significant (β = 0.07, SE = 0.03, t = 2.00, p = 0.046), indicating that job role moderates the relationship between an employee's status entitlement and employee turnover.

This model explains 38% of the variance in staff retention (R^2 = 0.38). The additional 3% change in variance was explained by the interaction terms (ΔR^2 = 0.03, p = 0.025), indicating that the job role as a moderator has improved model fitting. Given the significant moderating effect of job role on the relationships between perceived prestige and staff retention and between perceived status and staff retention, it can be concluded that these two relationships differ in strength for academic vs. non-academic staff.

5.2. Discussion of Findings

This study investigated perceived prestige and perceived status as predicting factors of staff retention in federal universities in Nigeria, using job role as moderating variable. The findings are presented in relation to the research questions and associated hypotheses.

Overall, the findings for Research Question 1 and Hypothesis H_{01} yielded a significant effect, with perceived prestige as a predictor of staff retention; thus, we reject the null hypothesis. The result from the regression analyses demonstrated that perceived prestige contributed positively and significant to keeping staff, suggesting that individuals who perceive their role as having respect and social value were more likely to stay in their institution. This finding indicates that symbolic recognition and professional reputation influence employees' commitment and retention. This suggests that improved

recognition and respect and the value attached to staff roles by institutions are likely to lead to higher levels of retention.

Similarly, in the test for Research Question 2 and Hypothesis H_{02}, perceived status significantly predicted staff retention, and the null hypothesis was rejected. In the regression result, the model indicated that perceived status has a positive relationship with staff retention, thus suggesting that employees whose positions are influential and recognised within the organisational hierarchy are more easily retained by their institutions. This means that organisational status, professional clout and status play a substantial role in employees' readiness to remain. This finding emphasises the need for equitable recognition of and role valuation within the university system.

The overall result of the two variables, perceived prestige and perceived standing (see Table 8) demonstrated that both predict staff retention jointly explaining a major percentage of the variance in the research on staff retention. This suggests that symbolic factors aggregate to have a greater effect on staff retention than they would individually (as is often studied). The finding indicates that employees' decisions to stay in their institutions are driven by both professional legitimacy and perceived organisational status.

Finally, the moderation analysis answered Research Question 4, which investigated whether job role moderates the relationship between perceived prestige and perceived status to staff retention. The correlations revealed weak but statistically significant associations between job role and perceived prestige (r =.12) and staff retention (r =.15), but its association with perceived status was weak (r =.10). These results depend on the level: perceived prestige and status affect differently academic and non-academic staff retention. This indicates job role may moderate this relationship, albeit at a small effect size level. In other words, there might be varying levels of recognition, status and, retention motivation between academic and non-academic staff in the university context.

In general, the study found perceived prestige and perceived status to be significant predictors with staff retention, and job role as a slight moderator of these relationships. The findings further suggest that enhancing professional recognition, promotion of organisational status and addressing role-based variances among categories of staff could significantly improve retention in federal universities.

6. Limitations of the Study

There are certain limitations in this study which should be addressed while interpreting the study findings. The study first used a cross-sectional survey approach where data were collected at one point in time. As a result, the study was able to demonstrate connections between perceived prestige, perceived status, job position and staff retention but was unable to determine causative links. Longitudinal studies would better inform the impact of these variables over time on retention.

Second, the main source of data for this study is self-reported information obtained via questionnaires. Three intrinsic flaws, such as response bias, social desirability bias, and individual perspective limits, might distort such data and make it more difficult to accurately depict real-world working experiences. Although anonymity and confidentiality measures were implemented to control these biases, residual risk remains that respondents may provide inaccurate responses that align with social expectations.

Third, the study was conducted on selected federal universities in Nigeria and the findings may not be entirely generalisable to state universities, private universities or other higher education institutions with distinct organisational structures and employment conditions.

Finally, a major drawback of this study is the population data employed for sample determination. A partial source of the total staff population of 34,306 was obtained from the 2017 records of the Federal Ministry of Education. Since these data are old, they may not reflect the current mix of the workforce in the selected federal universities in the Niger Delta area. Staff numbers may have fluctuated over time due to recurring industrial actions, budgetary restrictions, retirements, resignations and the rising migration of skilled individuals. This means the sampling frame may not have been a perfect representation of current conditions, although the large sample size helped to minimise this restriction.

7. Conclusion and Recommendations

7.1. Conclusion

The findings of this study provide evidence that the perceived prestige and perceived status being significantly predictors of staff retention in federal universities in Nigeria. Perceived social value, respect, and recognition of a role within the hierarchy makes employees likelier to stay with their institutions. It is also found that job role moderates these relationships, meaning that the effect of prestige and status on retention differs among academic staff vs non-academic staff.

The findings also suggest far more than what can be provided by the standard economic explanations of retention; staff may stay when they have other economic opportunities available to them if they enjoy symbolic or psychosocial benefits from their institution, such as being valued, respected and having an appropriate professional identity.

7.2. Recommendations

The study recommends that, based on the findings:

a) University management must institute reward structures that incentivise both academic and non-academic roles through awards, commendations and praise for staff contributions.

b) Organisational structures must promote equity and inclusiveness, recognising and empowering all categories of staff in all aspects of decision-making.

c) Retention strategies need to be differentiated; academic and non-academic staff have different needs and expectations.

d) Opportunities for career development, such as training, mentoring, and clear paths to promotion should be enhanced ensuring increased perceived status of participants and professional growth.

e) While symbolic elements like appreciation, recognition and a good workplace atmosphere are important for staff retention, it needs to be complemented with better compensation and welfare packages.

f) Future studies should aim to refine understanding of staff retention in the higher education sector by investigating other potential moderating variables including organisational culture, type of HE institution and leadership style.

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