



Administrative-to-Academic Career Transitions in Nigerian Higher Education: Identity Reconstruction, Transferable Skills, and Self-Efficacy

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ABSTRACT

Background: Higher education institutions in many developing countries face persistent shortages of qualified academic staff due to brain drain, increasing enrolments, and limited recruitment. While attention has largely focused on attracting and retaining academic personnel, little empirical research has examined the experiences of non-teaching administrative staff who transition into academic careers despite possessing valuable institutional knowledge and transferable professional competencies. Understanding how these individuals reconstruct their professional identities and adapt to academic roles is essential for developing sustainable talent pathways within higher education.

Objective: This study explored the identity reconstruction, transferable skills, and self-efficacy of non-teaching administrative staff who transitioned into academic careers in selected Nigerian higher education institutions.

Method: The study adopted an interpretive phenomenological design to examine participants' lived experiences. Guided by three research questions, it investigated the personal and professional motivations for career transition, the influence of prior administrative experience on academic preparedness, and the role of self-confidence, writing ability, and interpersonal relationships in facilitating successful adjustment. Twenty-three participants were purposively and snowball sampled from the University of Ibadan and The Polytechnic, Ibadan. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews using the *Career Transition Interview Schedule for Non-Teaching Staff (CTIS-NTS)* and analysed thematically.

Results: The findings revealed that career aspirations, opportunities for professional advancement, the desire to contribute to knowledge production, and personal fulfilment were the principal motivations for transitioning into academic careers. Previous administrative responsibilities—including management, office administration, safety and security, and secretarial services—provided transferable competencies such as organisational effectiveness, leadership, discipline, communication, report writing, and interpersonal skills. These competencies enhanced participants' academic self-efficacy, classroom confidence, professional identity, and capacity to adapt successfully to teaching and research responsibilities.

Conclusion: Administrative-to-academic career transition represents a viable but underutilised pathway for strengthening academic workforce capacity in Nigerian higher education. The successful integration of transferable administrative competencies into teaching and research roles demonstrates that prior professional experience can facilitate identity reconstruction, enhance self-efficacy, and improve academic performance.



Unique Contribution: This study extends career transition and higher education literature by conceptualising administrative-to-academic mobility as a strategic talent development pathway. It demonstrates how transferable administrative capital contributes to academic identity formation, professional confidence, and effective role adaptation in higher education institutions.

Key Recommendation: The study recommends that universities and regulatory agencies institutionalise Recognition of Prior Administrative Learning (RPAL) frameworks, incorporate structured mentoring and professional development programmes, and recognise transferable administrative competencies as strategic assets for strengthening academic workforce development.

Keywords: Career transition; academic identity; self-efficacy; transferable skills; higher education; human capital; professional development.

INTRODUCTION

Tertiary institutions in Sub-Saharan Africa are facing a severe and complex faculty staffing crisis that is undermining the quality of higher education across the region. The magnitude of this challenge is evident at multiple levels. For instance, according to a parliamentary budget committee report published in February 2026, only 10 per cent of academic positions at Busitema University are filled, compared with 15.65 per cent at Muni University, 19 per cent at Soroti University, and 39.63 per cent at Makerere University, the region's flagship institution (Nakayima, 2026; Achia, 2026). Similarly, the Demographic of African Faculty in the East African Community (DAF-EAC) project (2014), a collaborative initiative involving Education Sub-Saharan Africa, the Inter-University Council for East Africa (IUCEA), the Association of African Universities (AAU), and the Population Reference Bureau (PRB), found that none of the disciplines surveyed met the student-to-lecturer ratio recommended by the East African Commission for University Education. In Kenya, for example, the recommended ratio of 15:1 in Faculties of Education had risen to an average of 53:1. Consequently, the Kenyan Cabinet Secretary for Education acknowledged that the country would need to recruit approximately 35,000 additional faculty members by 2030 to meet the prescribed staffing standards (Omanyo & Kipruto, 2025). In Benin, the University of Abomey-Calavi requires between 3,200 and 3,500 lecturers to comply with West African regional standards but currently employs only about 800 tenured academics for an enrolment of nearly 100,000 students (Ecofin Agency, 2025). Union representatives have also reported that staffing shortages have significantly increased academic workloads, leaving lecturers with insufficient time between classes for rest and preparation. In some cases, academics reportedly teach continuously from 7:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m., with only a one-hour break (Tchaou, 2025).

The situation is equally concerning in Nigeria. The Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) reported that more than 309 professors resigned from public universities within a nine-month period in search of better working conditions abroad (ASUU, 2026). The increasing migration of scholars to countries such as the United Kingdom, Saudi Arabia, Cameroon, and other destinations has been described by union leaders as an "intellectual haemorrhage" that threatens the sustainability of public universities (Adebayo, 2026). This persistent loss of highly skilled academics has weakened teaching quality, reduced research productivity, and constrained



the development of higher education across the continent. It also contributes to the broader phenomenon of brain drain, with more than 10 per cent of postgraduate graduates reportedly leaving Africa each year in search of better opportunities elsewhere (Okonkwo et al., 2025).

In response to this growing crisis, governments, regional organisations, and higher education institutions have introduced various initiatives aimed at strengthening the academic workforce. However, many of these interventions remain narrowly focused and overlook potentially valuable sources of academic talent. In 2015, the South African Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) introduced the *Staffing South Africa's Universities Framework* (SSAUF), which projected the need to recruit at least 1,200 new academics annually to address historical staffing deficits, staff turnover, and planned sectoral growth. The framework also established initiatives such as the New Generation of Academics Programme (nGAP), a six-year developmental scheme designed to recruit and nurture early-career academics (DHET, 2015). At the continental level, the Association of African Universities (AAU) launched the Africa Education Jobs Board in 2020 to enhance the visibility of academic employment opportunities and promote staff mobility across African higher education institutions (AAU, 2020). Nevertheless, scholars have observed that the SSAUF does not explicitly recognise non-teaching staff as a potential source of academic recruitment, thereby limiting policy consideration of this important talent pool (Mbeki & Ndlovu, 2024).

Despite this omission, some institutions have begun exploring alternative staffing pathways. For example, the University of Ibadan converted 30 non-academic staff members to academic positions in 2019, citing financial constraints and the need to strengthen staffing within academic units (Tribune Online, 2019). Although such institutional initiatives are promising, they remain isolated and largely undertheorised. The COVID-19 pandemic further underscored the need for innovative approaches to higher education workforce development. Ekpenyong (2021a) argued that cultural and institutional knowledge constitute valuable transferable assets that can support educational transformation. Similarly, second-career academics—individuals who enter academia after pursuing another profession—often bring substantial practical experience to universities. However, they frequently encounter challenges in adapting to academic life due to unclear role expectations, feelings of exclusion, and the perceived undervaluation of their previous professional experience (Dunn et al., 2025). These emerging pathways therefore raise important policy questions regarding how universities can systematically identify, support, and integrate experienced administrative personnel into academic careers (Ogunleye et al., 2025).

Despite growing international interest in non-traditional academic entrants, a significant research gap remains within the Sub-Saharan African context. Existing studies have focused predominantly on conventional doctoral pathways or transitions from industry into academia, while little empirical attention has been paid to the experiences of non-teaching administrative staff who transition into academic careers. In particular, qualitative evidence on identity reconstruction, transferable competencies, and self-efficacy among this group remains scarce. This study addresses that gap by providing an in-depth qualitative exploration of administrative-to-academic career transitions within the socio-economic and institutional context of Nigerian



higher education. Using Nigeria as a case study, the research contributes to theoretical understandings of career identity, transferable skills, and self-efficacy, while generating practical insights for human resource policy and academic workforce development in Sub-Saharan Africa. The findings are expected to assist higher education institutions seeking innovative and cost-effective strategies for addressing faculty shortages through the strategic mobilisation of internal talent.

The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What personal (passion for teaching, career fulfilment, resilience) and professional (desire for academic freedom, exposure to opportunities, knowledge contribution) factors drive non-teaching administrative staff to transition to teaching roles in tertiary institutions?
2. How do prior administrative roles, including managerial, office management, safety/security, and secretarial duties, shape the skills, perceptions and readiness of staff who later transition to academic positions?
3. In what ways does prior administrative experience enhance self-confidence, writing ability and positive interpersonal relationships, and how do these assets facilitate a smoother transition to teaching?

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

This study is anchored on the integration of two complementary theories: Transition Theory (Schlossberg, 1981) and Professional Identity Theory, derived from Erikson's (1950) theory of identity formation and Marcia's (1966) Identity Status Theory. Together, these theories provide a comprehensive framework for understanding identity reconstruction, transferable skills, and self-efficacy among non-teaching administrative staff in Sub-Saharan African tertiary institutions who transition into academic roles.

Schlossberg's Transition Theory (1981), later refined by Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman (1995), conceptualises transition as an event or non-event that results in changes in relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles. Central to the theory is the premise that individuals' perceptions determine whether a particular event constitutes a transition. According to Schlossberg (1981) and Schlossberg et al. (1995), successful adaptation to transition depends on four interrelated factors, commonly referred to as the 4-S System: Situation, which encompasses the trigger, timing, duration, role change, degree of control, concurrent stress, and previous experience; Self, comprising demographic characteristics, personal outlook, values, commitment, and psychological resources; Support, including family, friends, colleagues, institutional structures, and community networks; and Strategies, referring to the coping mechanisms individuals adopt to manage, reinterpret, or adjust to transitional experiences.

The theory categorises transitions into three types: anticipated, unanticipated, and non-events. Anticipated transitions are expected life events, such as graduation, marriage, retirement, or career advancement, for which individuals can prepare psychologically, socially, and practically



(Schlossberg, 1981). Within higher education, examples include progression from doctoral studies to a lectureship or promotion from Senior Lecturer to Professor, both of which follow established institutional pathways. In contrast, unanticipated transitions occur unexpectedly and often involve crises, such as sudden illness, divorce, or job loss, leaving little opportunity for preparation or control (Schlossberg et al., 1995). Non-events refer to anticipated transitions that fail to occur. Schlossberg et al. (1995) identified four forms of non-events: personal, ripple, resultant, and delayed. Examples include failing to secure promotion or being denied admission into a graduate programme despite prior expectations.

The movement from an administrative position to an academic career is best conceptualised as an anticipated transition. First, the transition generally follows a clearly defined institutional pathway, requiring prospective academic staff to acquire higher qualifications, develop pedagogical competence, and satisfy prescribed conversion requirements (Ekpenyong, 2025). Such deliberate preparation reflects the characteristics of anticipated transitions identified by Schlossberg (1981). Second, the transition is usually self-initiated rather than imposed by external circumstances. Aiyede (2026) argued that aspirations for career fulfilment, passion for teaching, and the desire to contribute to knowledge production often motivate individuals to pursue academic careers intentionally rather than reactively. Third, several Nigerian universities have institutionalised conversion policies, including the University of Ibadan (Tribune Online, 2019) and the Federal University Dutsin-Ma (Education Monitor News, 2026), thereby providing formal pathways for eligible administrative staff. Nevertheless, while the career transition itself may be anticipated, the accompanying process of identity reconstruction may involve elements of unanticipated transitions and non-events. For some individuals, adapting to academic culture, gaining professional recognition, and establishing a sense of belonging may prove more challenging than expected (Yusoff, 2025).

Professional Identity Theory, rooted in Erikson's (1950) psychosocial theory and extended by Marcia (1966), explains professional identity as the evolving set of beliefs, values, commitments, and motivations associated with membership in a particular profession. Rather than being static, professional identity develops continuously through exploration, commitment, reflection, and the ongoing reassessment of professional goals and values. Individuals entering a new profession either adapt aspects of their previous professional identity or construct new identities that align with the expectations of their new roles. This perspective provides an appropriate framework for understanding how former administrative staff reconstruct their identities as academics while drawing upon competencies acquired in their previous positions. Experiences gained through administration—including organisational management, report writing, communication, leadership, and interpersonal relations—may strengthen self-confidence and facilitate successful adjustment to academic responsibilities (Aiyede, 2026).

Taken together, Transition Theory and Professional Identity Theory provide a robust theoretical framework for this study. While Transition Theory explains the structural, contextual, and coping dimensions of career transition, Professional Identity Theory illuminates the psychological processes through which individuals reconstruct their professional identities and develop academic self-efficacy. The 4-S framework offers a systematic lens for examining participants' situations, personal characteristics, support systems, and coping strategies, whereas Professional Identity Theory explains how resilience, confidence, and professional competence evolve during the transition process



(Ekpenyong & Kayode, 2022; Mpisi & Chinyama, 2026; Söner & Yılmaz, 2025). Together, the two theories provide a comprehensive foundation for understanding identity reconstruction, transferable administrative capital, and self-efficacy among non-teaching administrative staff transitioning into academic careers in Sub-Saharan African higher education.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted an interpretive phenomenological research design to explore the lived experiences, identity reconstruction, and transferable competencies of non-teaching administrative staff who transitioned into academic teaching roles. The design was considered appropriate because it enables an in-depth understanding of the meanings participants attach to their career transition experiences.

The study was conducted at The Polytechnic, Ibadan, and the University of Ibadan, Nigeria. Participants were initially selected through purposive sampling based on predetermined eligibility criteria, after which snowball sampling was employed to identify additional participants with similar experiences. A total of 23 participants were recruited. They had previously served in administrative positions—including Principal Assistant Registrar, Administrative Officer, Executive Officer, Laboratory Supervisor, Security Officer, and Clerical Officer—for a minimum of five years before transitioning into academic positions such as Assistant Lecturer, Lecturer, or Senior Lecturer, where they had served for at least one academic session. Participant recruitment continued until data saturation was achieved, with no substantially new themes emerging from subsequent interviews.

Data were collected using a semi-structured interview guide developed from the research questions and informed by Schlossberg's Transition Theory. Face-to-face interviews lasting between 40 and 60 minutes were conducted in private locations convenient to the participants. With participants' informed consent, all interviews were audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed verbatim for analysis. The data were analysed inductively using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis. To enhance trustworthiness, credibility was established through member checking, whereby participants reviewed summaries of their interview responses for accuracy. Transferability was supported through rich descriptions of the research context and participant characteristics. Dependability was ensured by maintaining a comprehensive audit trail comprising interview transcripts, coding records, analytical notes, and reflective journals. Confirmability was strengthened through reflexive journaling and an independent review of the coding process to verify consistency between the data and the emergent themes.

Formal institutional ethical approval was not required under the institutional guidelines in force at the time of the study. Nevertheless, all participants provided written informed consent before participation. They were informed that participation was entirely voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any stage without adverse consequences. To ensure confidentiality, pseudonyms were assigned to all participants, and all research data were securely stored on a password-protected computer accessible only to the research team.



RESULTS

Demographic Profile of Career Transition of Respondents (N = 23) Table

Demographic Category	Subcategory	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Age Group	31–40 years	2	8.7
	41–50 years	12	52.2
	50 years and above	8	34.8
	Failed to disclose age	1	4.3
Gender	Male	12	52.2
	Female	11	47.8
Highest Educational Qualification before transition	Bachelor's Degree	2	8.7
	Masters	8	34.8
	PGD/PGDE	1	4.3
	Ph.D.	7	30.4
	Unwilling to disclose qualifications	5	21.7
Current Position	Assistant Lecturer	4	17.4
	Lecturer (II, III, or unspecified)	9	39.1
	Senior Lecturer / Senior Research Fellow	5	21.7
	Teaching (general)	2	8.7
	Others (e.g., LI, Lecturer I)	3	13.0
Institution Type	University	12	52.2
	Polytechnic	9	39.1
	College of Education	2	8.7
Marital Status	Married	19	82.6
	Widow / Widower	2	8.7
	(Not specified)	2	8.7
Ethnicity	Yoruba	16	69.6
	Igbo	3	13.0
	Others (Hausa, others)	3	13.0
	(Not specified)	1	4.3
Position before transition	Principal Assistant Registrar / Admin Officer	7	30.4
	Administrative Officer / Executive Officer	6	26.1
	Chief / Senior Executive Officer	3	13.0
	Laboratory Supervisor / Security Officer / Clerical staff	4	17.4
	Others (e.g., Teacher, Non-teaching staff)	2	8.7
	Not willing to disclose	1	4.3



Research question 1: What personal (passion for teaching, career fulfilment, resilience) and professional (desire for academic freedom, exposure to opportunities, knowledge contribution) factors drive non-teaching administrative staff to transition to teaching roles in tertiary institutions?

Factors Influencing Career Transition

The participants' responses show that the decision to transition was not accidental; rather, it was shaped by a combination of deeply held personal motivations and evolving professional goals as presented under four sub-themes below.

A prominent theme is career aspiration (including desire for job independence), which captures the strong inner drive that propelled participants towards the transition. For some, this was framed as a quest for autonomy, as one participant explained that he was driven by a *"desire for job independence"* (Participant 1). Others expressed it more broadly as ambition and purpose, with Participant 3 noting that *"career aspiration motivated me so much"*. Passion for teaching also featured in these narratives; Participant 5 simply stated *"passion"*, while Participant 9 affirmed that *"I have passion for teaching"*. In a more personal reflection, Participant 12 shared that *"I love teaching right from my childhood"* and further emphasised that *"teaching is in my blood even before converting to academic staff"*, suggesting a lifelong vocational interest. Similarly, Participant 7 described the transition as a pathway to *"career fulfilment"*, while Participant 16 highlighted a clear goal in stating *"desire to lecture"*. For others, the journey was shaped by lived experiences and determination to progress. Participant 15 provided a vivid account, explaining that:

"when I was employed, I was a School Cert. holder... and due to challenges of bullying being a security man and peer pressure, I decided to further... that gave me edge ahead of HND holders to meet the requirements needed for conversion to academic cadre".

The responses reflect resilience and a deliberate effort to overcome structural and social barriers.

Participants shared how access to new experiences influenced their decisions and growth. Participant 1 remarked that *"it granted me exposure"*, suggesting that the transition opened doors to broader professional landscapes. In a similar vein, Participant 14 explained that *"I got the opportunity to explore and gain more knowledge in my teaching line"*, indicating that such exposure not only broadened horizons but also deepened subject-specific competence.

Participants also expressed an intrinsic motivation to engage in intellectual and scholarly work. Participant 1 expressed this succinctly as a *"desire to contribute to knowledge"*. This highlights a shift from routine administrative tasks to a more purpose-driven engagement with teaching and research, where individuals see themselves as active contributors to academic discourse. They also described how the move created opportunities for self-improvement and fulfilment. Participant 1 noted that *"it provided a ground for my development"*, indicating that the new role served as a platform for growth. Participant 15 offered a more reflective perspective, stating that:

"it's an eye-opener because you will not want to be left behind, so one is striving to attain peak in his career. Then there's job satisfaction; I love what I do now".

This captures both the competitive drive and the satisfaction derived from meaningful work. Additionally, Participant 17 pointed towards the need for sustained development, noting that “*there should be opportunities for personal development*”, which suggests that while growth has begun, continued institutional support remains essential.

Consequently, the responses demonstrate that a complex interplay of aspiration, exposure, intellectual curiosity, and the pursuit of self-development underpinned the transition.

The figure below summarises the personal and professional factors that influence non-teaching staff’s career transition. Four major factors are identified.



Figure 1: Personal and Professional Factors Influencing Career Transition

Research question 2: How do prior administrative roles, including managerial, office management, safety/security, and secretarial duties, shape the skills, perceptions and readiness of staff who later transition to academic positions?

Previous Roles as Non-Teaching Staff

Participants shared their previous roles before joining the academic. This reveals a rich blend of administrative, managerial, and support responsibilities that not only defined their earlier positions but also laid a foundation for their transition. These roles are organized into four subthemes, each illustrating the scope of experience participants brought with them.

Some of the participants have held managerial roles. They shared their involvement in leadership and coordination within the non-teaching structure. One of the participants explained that their role involved “*overseeing the non-teaching staff*” (Participant 1), indicating responsibility for supervision and team management. Similarly, Participant 11 noted that “*my primary responsibilities are to work as an executive officer*”, suggesting a formal administrative leadership position within the institutional hierarchy. In a more context-specific account, Participant 17 shared that “*I was a hostel custodian; in other words, an administrative role was carried out in the hall of residence*”, reflecting managerial duties within student accommodation.



These quotations show that many participants were already functioning in capacities that required decision-making, coordination, and oversight, even before their transition.

Some of the participants were involved in office management as managerial duties that capture the operational and organisational aspects of their previous roles were mentioned. Participant 1 referred to “*facility management*”, pointing to responsibilities linked to maintaining institutional infrastructure. Participant 6 described their role more broadly as “*office management and administration*”. Participant 18 emphasised routine but essential tasks such as “*keeping and recording office documents*”. The responses highlight the importance of organisational skills, record-keeping, and administrative efficiency, all of which are critical to the smooth functioning of any institution.

Safety and security were also among the roles performed before the transition. A participant provided a distinctive perspective on roles centred on protection and discipline within the institutional environment. Participant 15 offered a detailed and reflective account, explaining that “*as a security officer, my primary responsibility is to ensure safety of lives and properties within the campus*”. The participant went further to connect this duty with moral development, stating that

“becoming a graduate isn’t through a certificate only, but an individual must also be worthy in character and morals, so as a security officer, I played a vital role in ensuring students obey rules and regulations as required by the institution”.

This response reveals the broader educational contribution of non-academic staff, particularly in shaping students’ behaviour and upholding institutional values.

Some of the participants were engaged with documentation and communication tasks, performing secretarial duties in terms of minutes and report writing. Participant 1 highlighted responsibilities such as “*minutes and report writing*” and also noted serving as “*secretary to committees and boards*”, indicating active involvement in institutional governance processes. Participant 5 added a personal dimension, explaining that “*my presentations and report writing skills further enhanced my confidence*”. This suggests that such duties not only supported institutional operations but also contributed to individual skill development, particularly in communication and professional confidence.

On the whole, these responses demonstrate that participants’ previous roles were far from peripheral; rather, they were deeply embedded in the administrative and operational fabric of their institutions.

The figure below summarises the previous roles as non teaching staff before joining the academic. Four major roles are identified.

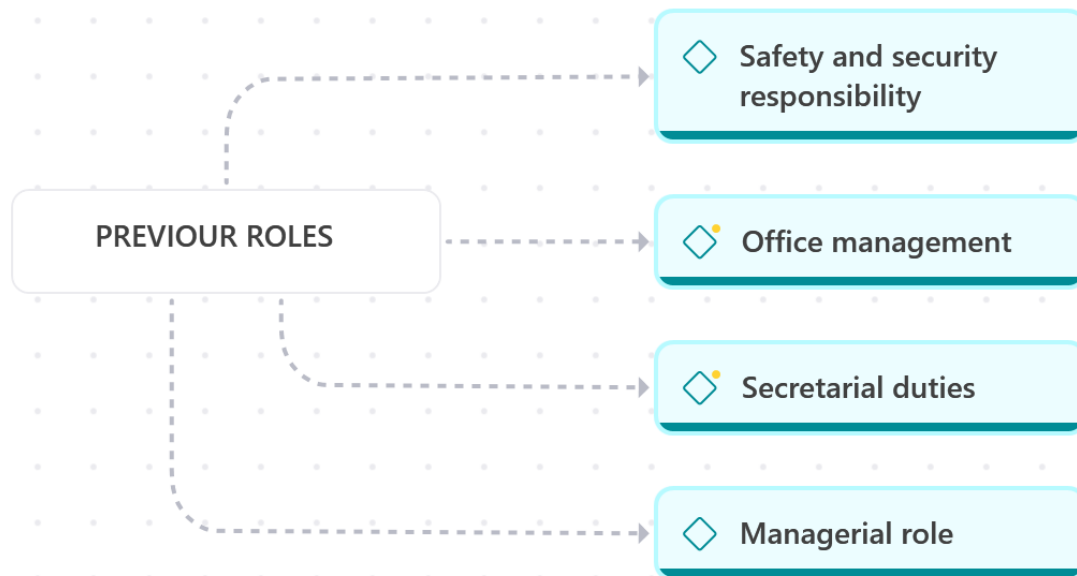


Figure 2: Previous roles as non-teaching Staff

Research question 3: In what ways does prior administrative experience enhance self-confidence, writing ability and positive interpersonal relationships, and how do these assets facilitate a smoother transition to teaching?

Influence of Previous Administrative Role on the Transition

The findings reveal that participants' previous administrative roles played a meaningful and largely positive role in shaping their transition experiences. These influences are captured under three key sub-themes, reflecting personal growth, skill development, and relational competence.

Many described how their prior roles provided a foundation for confidence and self-assurance in their new positions. One participant explained that *"it has helped my self-confidence"* (Participant 1), while also noting that *"it enhanced my self-esteem"* (Participant 1). This suggests a deepened sense of personal worth and professional identity. Another participant linked this confidence to practical classroom outcomes, stating that *"it makes me to be bold and have class control"* (Participant 14), indicating that administrative experience translated into assertiveness and authority in teaching contexts. Similarly, Participant 15 offered a more reflective account, noting that

"it actually opened my eyes to know exactly what's required of me to attain it, and personally, I don't like being a second class wherever I find myself".

This statement not only conveys increased awareness of professional expectations but also an intrinsic motivation to excel. These expressions illustrate how administrative exposure fostered both confidence and a proactive attitude towards professional growth.



Improved writing ability highlights the development of essential academic skills. Although less frequently mentioned, it remains significant by participants. Participant 1 succinctly observed that *“it enhanced my writing ability”*, pointing to the role of administrative tasks, such as report writing, documentation, and correspondence, in strengthening written communication skills. This improvement is particularly valuable in academic settings, where effective writing underpins teaching, research, and scholarly engagement. There are social benefits derived from prior administrative experience. Participants indicated that their roles had equipped them with the ability to relate effectively with others within the institution. One participant shared that *“it helped me have good interaction and relation with both teaching and non-teaching staff”* (Participant 1), emphasising the importance of cross-functional collaboration. In a similar vein, the same participant noted that *“it has helped me adjust in my interaction with people”* (Participant 1), suggesting increased adaptability and emotional intelligence in workplace relationships. These accounts highlight how administrative roles often require frequent interaction with diverse stakeholders, thereby fostering communication skills and relational competence that ease subsequent transitions.

Collectively, these responses demonstrate that prior administrative experience served as a valuable resource during the transition process. Beyond technical skills, prior administrative experience fostered confidence, enhanced communication, and strengthened interpersonal relationships, all of which supported participants' effective navigation of their new professional environments.

DISCUSSION

This study explored the identity shift, asset transfer and self-efficacy of non-teaching administrative staff who transitioned into academic teaching roles in Nigerian tertiary institutions. The findings confirm that such transitions are not accidental but are driven by a combination of personal factors, which include career aspiration, passion for teaching, career fulfilment, resilience, and lifelong vocational interest. The professional factors include exposure to opportunities, desire for knowledge contribution and personal growth. This aligns with Aiyede (2026), who established that teacher commitment and pedagogical content knowledge are critical predictors of student achievement, suggesting that the motivation driving non-teaching staff to transition is rooted in a genuine desire to contribute meaningfully to educational outcomes. However, while Aiyede (2026) focused on instructional organisation and its effect on learning outcomes, the present study extends this focus by examining the transition journey itself, offering insights into how administrative experience shapes pedagogical readiness.

Prior administrative experience in managerial, office management, safety and security, and secretarial roles provided transferable assets that shaped participants' skills and readiness. These assets included organisational efficiency, moral enforcement, report writing competence, and interpersonal communication, which collectively enhanced self-confidence, writing ability and positive relationships with colleagues and students. This finding is consistent with Ekpenyong and Kayode (2022), who observed that blended teaching and learning environments require staff to possess both technical and relational competencies; the present study suggests that



administrative staff already possess many of these competencies, though without formal recognition. Specifically, participants' improved writing ability from administrative documentation tasks (reports, minutes, correspondence) extends existing literature by demonstrating that such competence can be developed outside formal teacher preparation programmes and transferred into academic contexts.

The study makes a theoretical contribution by extending and refining two established frameworks. Schlossberg's Transition Theory (1981), particularly the 4-S model (Situation, Self, Support, Strategies), is usually applied to transitions where prior work experience is treated as part of the "Situation" dimension. However, the findings suggest that specific administrative role types constitute a distinct pre transition "Strategy" repertoire. For instance, security officers' moral enforcement experience directly supported classroom behaviour management, while secretarial report writing skills transferred to academic writing demands. This reframes prior administrative experience not merely as contextual background but as an active coping resource. This insight extends Ekpenyong's (2021) advocacy for value based transformational education by demonstrating that security personnel, who often enforce institutional rules and shape student character, already perform educative functions that align with pedagogical values. The study also demonstrates that administrative roles build relational capital, which functions as pre-existing "Support" within the 4-S model, accelerating adjustment and reducing transition anxiety, as participants already possessed institutional familiarity and established networks. This differs from the findings of Yusoff (2025), who noted that pracademics struggle with institutional belonging; participants in this study already belonged because their administrative roles embedded them institutionally.

Professional Identity Theory (Erikson, 1950; Marcia, 1966) reveals that identity reconstruction is not a linear process but involves exploration, commitment, and episodic revalidation of professional goals. Participants' narratives revealed a clear progression from an initial "exploration" phase (childhood passion for teaching) through "trial" and "establishment" phases (striving for career peak), mirroring the career learning cycles described in the literature. This aligns with Aiyede (2026), who observed that career decisions are often rooted in long-standing aspirations and intrinsic motivation. The administrative identity did not disappear; rather, it was integrated into the emerging academic identity, with prior administrative skills being recognised and repurposed within the new professional context. This integration reinforces Ekpenyong's (2025) argument that cultural and institutional knowledge are valuable transferable assets that transitioning staff can harness for sustainable development.

The findings also contribute to the growing literature on brain drain and faculty shortages in sub-Saharan Africa. The Association of African Universities (AAU, 2020) and the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA, 2024) have highlighted the acute shortage of qualified academic staff in the region. Similarly, Linake et al. (2025) identified barriers and opportunities in developing AI literacy among secondary school teachers in Nigeria, reinforcing the need for innovative teacher development pathways. The present study suggests that non-teaching administrative staff represent an underexplored talent pool that could help



mitigate these shortages, a finding that extends Aiyede's (2022) emphasis on instructional organisation by demonstrating that administrative experience can be repurposed for pedagogical effectiveness.

This research carries practical implications for institutional human resource policies in the Nigerian context. The study identified that participants' prior administrative roles cultivated self-confidence, writing ability, and positive interpersonal relationships that served as pre-existing strategies and relational capital, smoothing the transition to teaching. This suggests that universities should consider formal mechanisms to recognise prior administrative learning, such as documentation portfolio assessment, where administrative reports, minutes, and correspondence are evaluated for academic writing readiness. Such an approach could fast track teaching eligibility without requiring additional coursework, potentially addressing faculty shortages more efficiently. This recommendation aligns with Ekpenyong's (2021) call for value based transformational education that affirms non-traditional learning and extends existing literature on teacher preparation by proposing that administrative writing competence can be formally accredited.

The scope of this study is limited to the University of Ibadan and The Polytechnic Ibadan. Generalisation to other sub Saharan African tertiary institutions should be undertaken with caution, as institutional policies, cultural contexts, and staff experiences may differ substantially across the region. The qualitative nature of the study, while providing rich, in-depth insights, limits the extent to which findings can be statistically generalised. Future research should examine the applicability of these findings in other national and institutional contexts, explore the experiences of staff who attempted but did not complete the transition, and investigate the long-term career trajectories of transitioning staff. Longitudinal studies would be particularly valuable to understand how identity reconstruction and self-efficacy evolve, as suggested by Itasanmi et al. (2023), who noted that contextual factors significantly influence motivation and persistence in educational settings.

The study contributes to the growing body of knowledge on non-traditional academic pathways by demonstrating that non-teaching administrative staff possesses transferable assets in terms of organisational skills, interpersonal relationships, and resilience that are often overlooked in conventional academic recruitment processes. By centring the voices and experiences of those who have made this journey, the research offers a foundation for rethinking human resource strategies in higher education. It also provides empirical evidence that challenges the assumption that academic competence is exclusively derived from doctoral training, suggesting instead that prior administrative experience can serve as a legitimate and valuable pathway to academic excellence.

CONCLUSION

The study illustrates the transferable assets of the non-teaching administrative staff of tertiary institutions in Nigeria, which are not being considered in the conventional approach to academic recruitment. The findings show that previous administrative experiences can foster confidence,



writing proficiency, and interpersonal skills, which undermines the view that academic preparation is only gained from doctoral education. In theory, the study builds upon Schlossberg's Transition Theory by conceptualising administrative experiences as a coping resource and adds to Professional Identity Theory by showing the integration of administrative and academic identities. From an operational perspective, the results highlight the importance of institutional arrangements to value previous administrative experience, including portfolio assessment. The findings from the two institutions in Nigeria, though restricted, can serve as a basis for re-thinking human resource strategies in similar contexts. The findings from this study should be examined in a variety of institutional environments in future studies. Ultimately, this research underscores the viability of alternative career trajectories as a solution to the problem of faculty shortages and improves academic quality in higher education.

Ethical clearance

Ethical consent was sought and obtained from the participants used in this study. They were made to understand that the exercise was purely for academic purposes, and their participation was voluntary.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

Authors' Contributions

All authors contributed to the conception, literature review, drafting and revision of the manuscript. They all agreed that the manuscript should be published.

Data availability statement

The datasets on which conclusions were made for this study are available on reasonable request.

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