The Role of Management Policies on Employee Performance in Public Universities, Kenya

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Abstract- This study examined the role of management policies on employee performance in public universities in Kenya, focusing on how institutional policies shape productivity, motivation, and job satisfaction among university staff. Grounded in the Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory, the study employed a cross-sectional survey research design targeting 26,630 employees across public chartered universities and constituent colleges in Kenya. Using the Krejcie and Morgan formula, a sample of 384 respondents was determined, with 342 questionnaires successfully returned, yielding an 89.06% response rate. Data were collected through structured questionnaires and analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics, including correlation and regression analyses. Descriptive findings revealed that employees strongly agreed with positive management policy indicators, with overall mean scores of 4.24 on a five-point Likert scale. Regression analysis demonstrated that management policies had a positive and statistically significant effect on employee performance (R = 0.678, R² = 0.460, p < 0.01), indicating that 46.0% of the variance in employee performance could be attributed to management policies. The findings reveal that clearly formulated, transparent, and participatory management policies positively influence employee performance by enhancing accountability, equity, and professional growth. Conversely, rigid or poorly communicated policies contribute to low motivation and diminished productivity. The study concludes that effective management policies serve as critical tools for aligning institutional objectives with employee capabilities and recommends continuous policy review, staff engagement, and capacity-building initiatives to strengthen performance outcomes in Kenya's public universities.

Index Terms- Management Policies, Employee Performance, Public Universities, Human Resource Management

I. INTRODUCTION

Public universities in Kenya operate within a formal governance and regulatory framework that shapes their management policies, including human resource procedures, performance appraisal systems, staff development programs, and institutional statutes created under the Universities Act (Agunda, 2024). These policies are intended to ensure accountability, quality assurance, and effective use of public resources. However, their design and implementation vary considerably across institutions and over time, creating disparities in employee performance outcomes across the public university sector.

Effective management policies matter because employee performance in higher education extends beyond individual ability to encompass organizational arrangements: clear job descriptions, transparent promotion and reward systems, ongoing training, fair employee relations, and reliable performance measurement systems (Kyondo, Mugaa & Gitari, 2023). Empirical studies in Kenya link human resource management practices including recruitment, training, appraisal, and employee involvement with employee outcomes such as productivity, motivation, and service delivery in public universities. Several recent university-based studies report positive associations between well-structured management policies and improved staff performance, while also noting implementation gaps including inconsistent appraisal, limited training budgets, and weak employee participation (Iseu, 2024).

The COVID-19 pandemic further transformed the higher education landscape, introducing hybrid work systems that blend on-site and remote work across academic and administrative departments (Muriithi, 2024; Onyango, 2024). However, this shift has revealed significant misalignments between existing management policies and the operational realities of contemporary work arrangements. Many institutions

continue to rely on policies designed for traditional, face-to-face environments, particularly in performance appraisal, staff development, and flexible work arrangements, leading to unclear expectations, inconsistent evaluations, and reduced coordination within teams (Agunda, Were & Mboya, 2024).

Specific management policy domains that influence employee performance in Kenyan public universities include performance appraisal and measurement systems, training and professional development policies, employee relations and participation mechanisms, and flexible work and work-life balance arrangements (Mahando & Juma, 2020). Understanding how these policy domains interact to influence employee performance is essential for university councils, the Commission for University Education, and ministry policymakers seeking to improve public higher-education performance.

Despite the recognized importance of management policies, evidence suggests that their implementation within Kenyan public universities remains uneven and often symbolic rather than functional (Mahando & Juma, 2020). Most studies have examined isolated HR practices such as training or performance appraisal without considering management policy as an integrated framework. This study therefore sought to assess the effect of management policies on employee performance in public universities in Kenya, contributing policy-relevant evidence that can inform strategic reforms and capacity-building initiatives.

II.   LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Framework

This study was grounded in the Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory, first proposed by Stevan E. Hobfoll in 1989 and subsequently refined in organizational and occupational psychology contexts (Halbesleben, Neveu, Paustian-Underdahl & Westman, 2014). The theory posits that individuals strive to obtain, retain, and protect resources they value, and that resource losses have a stronger psychological impact than equivalent gains, making loss prevention critical for sustained performance and well-being.

Within the context of this study, management policies in Kenyan public universities are conceptualized as critical organizational resources that shape employee performance. Supportive policies such as fair rewards, clear performance management systems, training opportunities, and equitable promotion structures enhance employees' resource reservoirs, reduce occupational stress, and encourage greater effort and engagement, ultimately leading to improved performance (Odengo, Bula & Kiiru, 2022). Conversely, inadequate or poorly implemented policies constitute resource threats or losses, prompting employees to conserve their remaining resources through reduced motivation and effort, which negatively affects performance outcomes.

COR theory remains highly relevant to Kenyan public universities, where resource constraints and evolving work models require effective strategies for employee engagement. The theory provides insight into how hybrid work supports resource conservation (Miller & Davis, 2024), how communication tools improve efficiency (Anderson & Thomson, 2024), and how management practices and team dynamics promote well-being and productivity (Roberts & Mertonez, 2024). Research by Marta, Bioliz, and Turska (2023) demonstrates that resource fluctuations in hybrid settings influence burnout and disengagement, further validating COR theory's applicability to contemporary higher education contexts.

2.2 Management Policies and Employee Performance

Empirical research has consistently established relationships between management policies and employee performance across various organizational contexts. Kasule, Mugizi, and Rwothumio (2021) conducted a cross-sectional study with 198 academic staff at Kyambogo University, Uganda, using Structural Equation Modeling to assess how HRM practices influence job performance and satisfaction. Their findings revealed that recruitment and placement had significant positive effects on job performance, though development, engagement, and retention practices showed minimal impact, suggesting partial effectiveness of HRM strategies with weaknesses in fostering long-term staff engagement.

Rutaganda and Narayan (2023) investigated the effect of Human Resource Management practices on employee performance in Rwanda's public sector using data from 103 employees at the Rwanda Development Board. The study revealed a strong positive relationship between career development practices and employee performance ($r = 0.694$, $p = 0.000$), while compensation practices showed a significant negative correlation with performance ($r = -0.513$, $p = 0.000$), indicating that misaligned pay structures could demotivate employees. This finding highlights the critical importance of policy coherence across different HR domains.

In the Kenyan context, Mahando and Juma (2020) examined the influence of human resource management practices on employee performance in public universities, focusing on the Technical University of Kenya. Their findings demonstrated positive associations between structured HR practices and employee outcomes, while also identifying implementation challenges including bureaucratic culture, resource limitations, and inconsistent leadership. Similarly, Gachie (2016) found that HR policies significantly influenced employee morale and satisfaction in Kenyan non-governmental organizations, inferring performance outcomes through employees' commitment to organizational goals.

2.3 Work-Life Balance and Flexible Work Policies

Work-life balance policies have emerged as critical determinants of employee performance in contemporary organizations. Agunda, Were, and Mboya (2024) examined work-life balance practices and employee performance in public universities in Kenya, finding that policies supporting flexible work arrangements, leave management, and family-friendly initiatives significantly enhanced productivity and job satisfaction. Their study emphasized that universities implementing comprehensive work-life balance policies experienced higher levels of employee engagement and lower turnover intentions.

The transition to hybrid work arrangements following the COVID-19 pandemic has further highlighted the importance of flexible work policies. Muriithi (2024) explored hybrid work systems and employee performance, providing conceptual and empirical perspectives on how organizations can effectively manage distributed workforces. The study concluded that hybrid work, when supported by appropriate policies, can serve as a resource conservation strategy that enhances employee well-being and productivity. Onyango (2024) provided complementary evidence from Kenyan higher education institutions, demonstrating that hybrid working arrangements positively influenced employee performance when accompanied by clear policy guidelines and adequate technological support.

2.4 Performance Management Systems

Performance management systems constitute a critical policy domain influencing employee outcomes. Muchira and Kiambati (2015) examined how performance management systems including goal setting, performance monitoring, feedback, and employee participation affected employee performance within Kenya's Ministry of East African Community. Their findings indicated that structured PMS components significantly enhanced performance by aligning individual efforts with organizational goals, thereby boosting motivation and productivity. However, institutional challenges such as bureaucratic culture, resource limitations, and inconsistent leadership were found to weaken system effectiveness.

Kyondo, Mugaa, and Gitari (2023) investigated employee relations and staff performance in public universities within Nairobi County, Kenya. Their study found that positive employee relations, characterized by effective communication channels, transparent grievance procedures, and meaningful involvement in decision-making, significantly enhanced staff performance. The research emphasized that management policies governing employee relations serve as critical organizational resources that influence both individual and collective performance outcomes.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a cross-sectional survey research design, which involves collecting data from multiple respondents at a single point in time. Survey research methods enable the administration of structured

questionnaires to a specified number of respondents, with their responses forming the primary data source (Kothari, 2004; Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2014). This design was appropriate for examining the relationship between management policies and employee performance across multiple public university settings.

The study targeted a population of 26,630 employees working in public chartered universities and public university constituent colleges in Kenya. The sample size was determined using the Krejcie and Morgan formula of 1970, which yielded 384 respondents. The formula applied was: $n = (Z^2pq)/d^2$, where n represents the desired sample size, Z is the standard normal deviate at 95% confidence level (1.96), p is the proportion estimated to have the measured characteristics (0.5), q equals 1-p, and d is the level of statistical significance (0.05).

Data were collected through self-administered structured questionnaires distributed to both academic and non-academic staff across selected public universities. Management policies were operationalized and measured using eight questionnaire items on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). The items assessed dimensions including work-life balance promotion, supervisor support for flexible arrangements, leave policy clarity, equal opportunity access, and policy fairness.

Data analysis employed both descriptive and inferential statistics using SPSS software. Descriptive analysis included means, standard deviations, and percentages. Inferential statistics included bivariate correlation analysis to test associations between variable pairs and regression analysis (linear and multiple) to examine effects on employee performance. Multicollinearity was assessed using Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) and tolerance values. The study adhered to ethical research standards including informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Response Rate

Of the 384 questionnaires administered to academic and non-academic staff, 342 were successfully returned, yielding a response rate of 89.06%. According to Mugenda and Mugenda (2012), a response rate of 80% and above is considered excellent for descriptive surveys, indicating that the achieved response rate was adequate for meaningful statistical analysis and generalization of findings.

Table 1: Response Rate Distribution

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Questionnaires Administered	384	100.00%
Questionnaires Returned	342	89.06%
Questionnaires Unreturned	42	10.94%

4.2 Descriptive Statistics for Management Policies

Descriptive analysis of management policy indicators revealed consistently positive employee perceptions across all measured dimensions. The results indicated that respondents strongly agreed with statements regarding management policies promoting healthy work-life balance (M = 4.24, SD = 0.851), supervisor support for flexible work arrangements (M = 4.26, SD = 0.860), and clarity of leave and time-off policies (M = 4.30, SD = 0.871).

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics for Management Policy Indicators

Management Policy Indicator	Mean	Std. Dev.
Work-life balance promotion	4.24	0.851
Supervisor supports flexible arrangements	4.26	0.860
Leave policies are clear and understandable	4.30	0.871
Equal access to opportunities and resources	4.19	0.883
Work-life balance is encouraged	4.22	0.843

Management Policy Indicator	Mean	Std. Dev.
Management supports flexible arrangements	4.19	0.871
Leave request process is straightforward	4.35	0.813
Policies ensure equal opportunities	4.22	0.861
Overall Mean	4.24	0.86

The highest-rated indicator was the straightforward nature of leave request processes (M = 4.35, SD = 0.813), with 89.8% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing. Equal access to opportunities and resources received the lowest mean score (M = 4.19, SD = 0.883), though still reflecting positive perceptions. The overall mean of 4.24 indicates that employees generally perceive management policies favorably, aligning with Agunda, Were, and Mboya's (2024) findings that supportive work-life balance policies enhance employee satisfaction in Kenyan public universities.

4.3 Regression Analysis Results

Regression analysis was conducted to determine the effect of management policies on employee performance. The results revealed a positive and statistically significant relationship between management policies and employee performance (r = 0.678, p < 0.01). The regression model produced an R value of 0.678 and R² of 0.460, indicating that 46.0% of the variance in employee performance could be explained by management policies.

Table 3: Regression Model Summary

Model Statistics	Value	Interpretation
R	0.678	Strong positive correlation
R Square	0.460	46.0% variance explained
Adjusted R Square	0.458	Adjusted for predictors
F Change	95.857	Model significance
Sig. F Change	0.000	p < 0.01

The F change value of 95.857 (p < 0.01) confirmed the goodness of fit of the regression model, supporting the conclusion that management policies are significant predictors of employee performance in public universities. The unstandardized coefficient (B = 0.713) indicates that a one-unit increase in management policy effectiveness would result in a 0.713-unit increase in employee performance. These findings are consistent with Rutaganda and Narayan's (2023) observation of strong positive relationships between HR practices and employee performance in Rwanda's public sector.

Table 4: Regression Coefficients

Variable	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	-0.475	0.276	-	-1.721	0.087
Management Policies	0.713	0.081	0.491	8.821	0.000

Multicollinearity diagnostics indicated acceptable values, with VIF of 1.799 (below the threshold of 10) and tolerance of 0.556 (above 0.1), confirming the absence of problematic multicollinearity. The standardized beta coefficient (β = 0.491) indicates a moderate to strong effect size, suggesting that management policies have substantial practical significance for employee performance outcomes.

4.4 Discussion of Findings

The findings demonstrate that management policies play a significant role in shaping employee performance in Kenya's public universities. The strong positive correlation (r = 0.678) and substantial variance explained (R² = 46.0%) indicate that well-designed and effectively implemented policies constitute valuable organizational resources that enhance employee productivity, consistent with the Conservation of Resources Theory's proposition that supportive organizational arrangements enable employees to acquire and protect resources necessary for sustained performance.

The positive employee perceptions of work-life balance policies (overall M = 4.24) align with

Agunda, Were, and Mboya's (2024) findings emphasizing the importance of flexible work arrangements in public universities. The high rating for leave policy clarity (M = 4.30) suggests that transparent, well-communicated policies reduce uncertainty and enable employees to manage their professional and personal responsibilities effectively, thereby conserving cognitive and emotional resources that can be directed toward performance-enhancing activities.

However, the relatively lower rating for equal opportunity access (M = 4.19) indicates an area requiring policy attention. This finding resonates with Kasule, Mugizi, and Rwothumio's (2021) observation of weaknesses in development and engagement practices within African universities. Ensuring equitable access to professional development opportunities and resources may require more deliberate policy interventions to maximize the performance benefits of management policies across all employee categories.

V.   CONCLUSION

This study examined the role of management policies on employee performance in public universities in Kenya. Based on the empirical findings, several conclusions can be drawn regarding the nature and magnitude of this relationship.

First, management policies have a positive and statistically significant effect on employee performance in Kenya's public universities. The regression results (R = 0.678, R² = 0.460, p < 0.01) confirm that effective management policies explain a substantial proportion of variance in employee performance, validating the hypothesis that policy frameworks serve as critical organizational resources influencing workforce productivity.

Second, employees in Kenya's public universities generally perceive management policies favorably, with an overall mean of 4.24 on a five-point scale. Particularly strong perceptions exist regarding leave policy clarity, supervisor support for flexible arrangements, and work-life balance promotion. These positive perceptions suggest that considerable progress has been made in policy development, though continuous improvement remains necessary.

Third, effective management policies serve as critical tools for aligning institutional objectives with employee capabilities. Clearly formulated, transparent, and participatory policies enhance accountability, equity, and professional growth, creating conditions conducive to high performance. Conversely, rigid or poorly communicated policies contribute to low motivation and diminished productivity.

Fourth, the Conservation of Resources Theory provides a useful framework for understanding the policy-performance relationship. Supportive policies function as organizational resources that enhance employees' capacity to perform, while inadequate policies represent resource threats that trigger protective behaviors potentially detrimental to performance.

VI.   RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, the following recommendations are proposed to strengthen the positive influence of management policies on employee performance in Kenya's public universities:

1. Public universities should refine and enforce equal opportunity policies to promote workplace fairness and inclusivity, addressing the relatively lower perceptions of equitable access to opportunities and resources identified in this study.

2. University management should strengthen work-life balance policies by implementing flexible work schedules, mental health support programs, and family-friendly initiatives to enhance overall job satisfaction and performance.

3. The Commission for University Education should develop guidelines for continuous policy review and staff engagement mechanisms, ensuring that management policies remain responsive to evolving workforce needs and institutional contexts.

4. University councils should allocate resources for capacity-building initiatives that equip managers and supervisors with skills to implement policies effectively, ensuring that

well-designed policies translate into improved performance outcomes.

5. Future research should employ longitudinal designs to examine the causal mechanisms through which management policies influence performance over time, and explore moderating factors such as organizational culture and leadership styles.

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