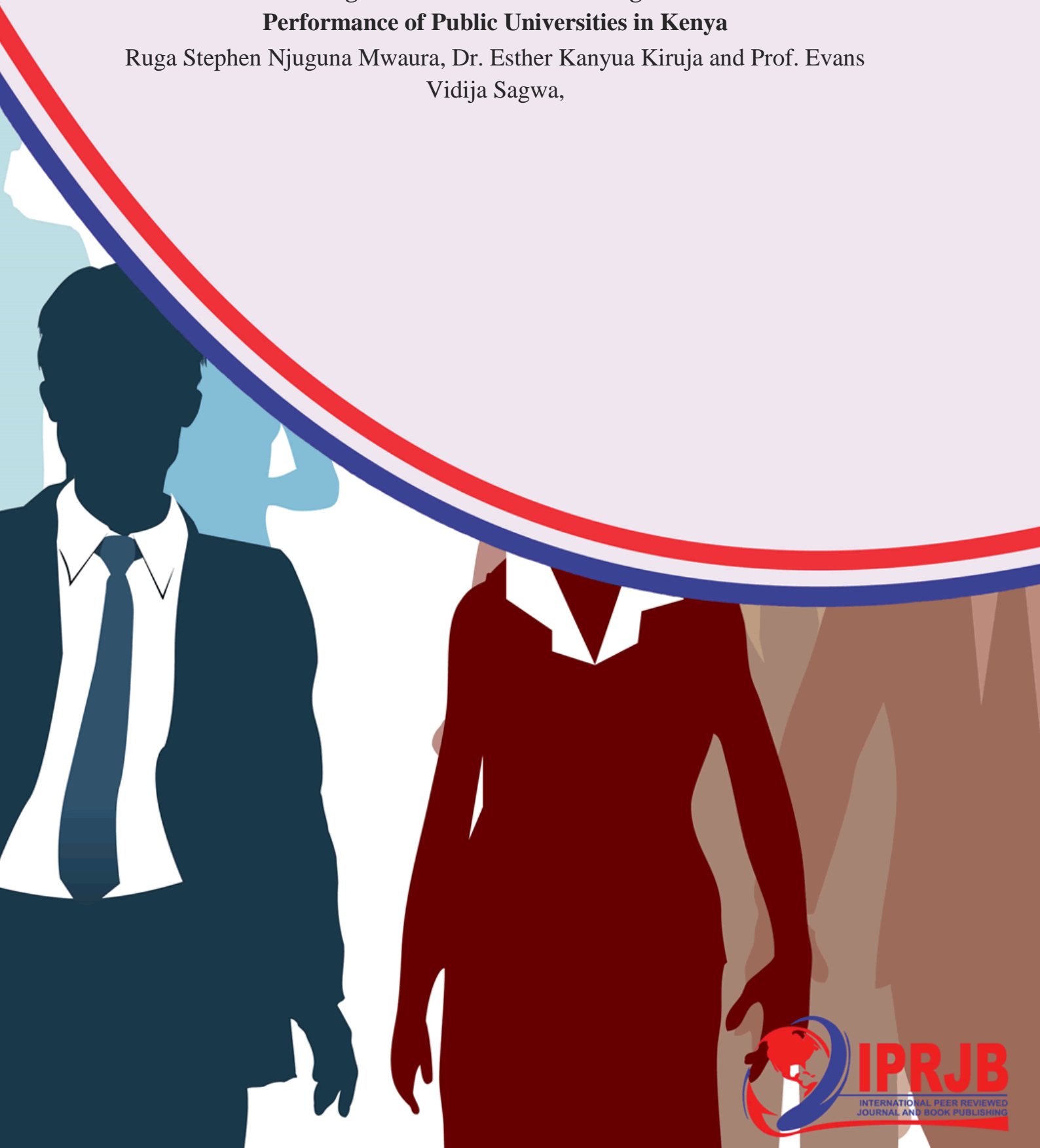


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**Influence of Strategic Human Resource Management Practices on
Performance of Public Universities in Kenya**

Ruga Stephen Njuguna Mwaura, Dr. Esther Kanyua Kiruja and Prof. Evans
Vidija Sagwa,



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¹Ruga Stephen Njuguna Mwaura

PhD Candidate, School of Business and Management Studies, Technical University of Kenya

Corresponding Author: Email: steve_ruga@yahoo.co.uk

²Dr. Esther Kanyua Kiruja,

Senior Lecturer, School of Business and Management Studies, Technical University of Kenya

³Prof. Evans Vidija Sagwa,

Associate Professor, School of Business and Management Studies, Technical University of Kenya

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Abstract

Purpose: The objective of the study was to determine the effect of Strategic Human Resource Management Practices (SHRMPs) on performance of public universities.

Methodology: This study was essentially guided by the Resource Based Theory, as exemplified by the philosophical inclination of the study was positivist ontology. The research used a descriptive research design, in a census approach. The target population of the study were all public universities in Kenya. Data was collected from 31 public universities in Kenya with the aid of a self-administered questionnaire. Out of the 117 questionnaires that were distributed, 110 were returned and were found to be usable providing a 71% response rate. Descriptive statistics and linear regression analyses were used to analyze the data.

Findings: The main finding of the study indicated that there was a statistically significant relationship between the bundle of SHRMPs (rigorous recruitment, staff training, reward management and performance management), and performance of public universities in Kenya. The hypothesis of the study was that SHRMPs do not have an effect on the performance of public universities in Kenya. This finding was determined to be in tandem with the Resource Based Theory (Barney, 2001), which, among other points of emphasis, stresses the centrality of leveraging on people as key resources of an enterprise. The finding also resonated with empirical literature, including Al-Khaled & Chung (2020), who found that that entities which adopted strategic human resource management practices were able to sustainably improve their performance, and Mathushan & Kengatharan (2022), who found that the bundle of strategic human resource management practices, consisting of training, rewarding and performance management practices did positively impact on organizational performance.

Unique Contribution to Theory, Practice and Policy: The finding of this study, that SHRM practices positively and significantly influence the performance of public universities, are arguably expansionary to the Resource Based Theory (RBT), as proposed by Barney (2001). Although the Resource Based Theory does not directly address strategic human resource management practices as elements of performance, it postulated that business entities needed to focus internally to activate resources, the most important one of which is the people resource. It is the people resource which enables such entities to achieve competitive advantage in their operations, given that it is the human resource which mobilizes, and creates value from the other resources within the enterprise.

In this respect, therefore, it follows that every intervention made towards creating and enhancing the human resource capacity, including, as conceptualized in this study; rigorous recruitment, staff training, rewarding them and strategically managing their performance, does count, towards enhancing the contribution of the human resources, as exemplified by the Resource Based Theory, and consequently, activating the essential asset, towards competitive organizational performance.

More directly, this empirical finding, regarding the positive influence of strategic human resource management practices on performance of public universities in Kenya has implications with respect to the public universities in Kenya. The main one is that, the public universities ought to take deliberate measures in determining and selecting appropriate SHRMPs. Such practices, according to the Resource Based Theory (Barney, 2001), are expected to be valuable, inimitable, and rare and may not be substitutable, in ensuring that public universities, like any other organizations, are able to sustainably achieve competitive advantage in their markets. This is further corroborated by the findings of Sagwa, K'Obonyo and Ogutu (2014), who averred that investing in human resources was crucial in promoting organizational performance.

It is also the considered opinion of this study that, the finding that SHRMPs positively influenced the performance of public universities in Kenya, constituted new knowledge, at least, in extending the Resource Based Theory, as well as adding to the empirical literature with regard to strategic human resource management practices. Furthermore, the implications of the finding made, are more than likely to be relevant beyond the public universities sub-sector, and probably to include the entire public sector and, indeed, all organizations in general.

To this end, therefore; human resource managers, HR departments, and units within public universities and other public and private entities, other human resource management practitioners, policy makers in HR-oriented public and private sector, as well as the community of researchers in human resource management and the related other disciplines, are likely to find the finding of this study useful. This is particularly considering the study's recommendation that organizations have to identify and adopt appropriate bundles of SHRMPs that would reliably enable them to attain and sustain their competitive levels of performance.

Keywords: *Strategic Human Resource Management Practices, Performance of Public Universities*

INTRODUCTION

All enterprises exist to achieve certain ends. Organizational performance, which is more often measured quantitatively, usually in economic terms, is also now more increasingly being measured qualitatively. This performance is said to be achieved when all the efforts of individual employees and sections of an enterprise are aggregated (Zehir, Gurol, Karaboga, and Kole (2016). Empirically, the relevance of human resource management practices in the pursuit of desired performance by enterprises has been documented variously.

For instance, Otoo (2019), found that employees contributed competencies which impacted on the linkage between selected HRM practices and enterprise performance. Moustaghfir, El Fatihi and Benouarrek (2020), averred by finding that human resource management practices provided a useful leverage in striving to achieve desired performance by any enterprise.

It is important to note, however, that the foregoing empirical studies, among others, which link human resource management practices with performance of enterprises, seem to focus on human resource management practices, usually at the functional level, affecting performance, as opposed to strategic human resource management practices, usually at the strategic level, affecting performance, as conceptualized in this study. The former is more to do with operationalizing human resource management at the department level, while the latter refers to operationalizing human resource management by linking HR practices to the strategic direction of an enterprise (Bouaziz, and Smaoui (2018). It is at the strategic level of human resource management that this study was premised.

In this regard, strategic human resource management practices refer to application of a structured bundle of HR-oriented interventions by an organization towards achieving strategic organizational goals, and therefore, the enhancement of the ability of such an organization to influence its performance (Ojokuku and Akanbi, 2015). This study conceptualized the bundle of strategic human resource practices as; rigorous recruitment, staff training, reward management and performance management. More specifically, therefore, various studies have linked strategic human resource management practices to the performance of enterprises. For instance, Al-Khaled & Al-Khaled, Sultan & Chung, Jee Fenn, 2020), who pointed out that entities that adopted strategic human resource management practices (SHRMPs) reated a sustaining capacity in attaining their goals and to flourish in their respective industries. Likewise, Eneh and Awara (2016), in a descriptive study on strategic human resource management practices and organizational growth in Nigeria, found that Strategic Human Resource Management Practices (SHRMPs) had significantly impacted the growth of organizations, and that such entities were able to utilize their human resources much better as a result.

They added that strategic human resource management practices such as training of employees, human resource planning, prompt rewarding, and selective recruitment served as drivers of sustainable competitive advantage. However, it is notable that the majority of empirical studies linking strategic human resource management practices to the performance of enterprises are contextualized in the private sector rather than in the public sector (Knies, Boselie, Gould-Williams and Vandenabeele, 2018). Hence, more relevant to strategic human resource

management practices and performance of public entities, and in this case, public universities, a descriptive study covering eight Nigerian universities determined that using SHRM practices had beneficially impacted the public universities variously through attraction of more researching sponsorships, increasing scholarly writings and research-based innovations. As a recommendation, the study pointed to the need for the universities in Nigeria to be strategic at operationalizing the HR function to enable improving performance in mitigation of the declining performance (Ojokuku and Akanbi, 2015).

In Kenya, using a census study targeting public universities in Kenya, Mutahi and Busienei (2015) revealed that strategic HRM practices positively affected performance of public universities in Kenya. In this case, strategic rewarding and training of employees as strategies were found to be key. They relevantly recommended development of appropriate employment policy to encourage job security and that the government ought to base the recruitment and selection in universities on the equalizing employment opportunity principle, with periodic analysis of employee competencies and a refocusing on identification of employee training needs for employee growth among other interventions.

Likewise, Naitore and Wanyoike (2019), using a descriptive survey of 13 public universities in Kenya, established that there was a positive and significant relationship linking strategic human resource management practices, in terms of HR planning and staffing and the performance of selected Public Universities in Kenya. From the foregoing literature, there is little doubt, if any, that strategic human resource management practices do, indeed positively influence performance in public universities.

However, at the same time, the current evidence of declining performance in public universities seems to contradict the empirical evidence that the implementation of strategic human resource management practices in public universities did positively impact their performance. Furthermore, the current literature, does not seem to address strategic human resource management practices as a bundle, their possible influence on the performance of public universities, as conceptualized in this study, seeming to focus more on human resource management practices at the functional level. In addition, most of the studies reviewed were contextualized in the private sector, and mainly outside Kenya, and many of them were either cross-sectional, case studies and or surveys, unlike this study which used a census design.. In the light of these gaps, there was a need, therefore, to attempt to empirically address them, and hence this study.

METHODOLOGY

The philosophical inclination of the study was positivist ontology. The research design adopted was cross sectional descriptive survey. The target population of the study were academic and non-academic employees of all 37 public universities in Kenya. The sample of the study comprised of 155 respondents purposively selected from the three union representatives respectively (UASU, KUSU, KUDHEIHA), as well as one senior representative each from Academic Registrar and HR departments respectively). Data was collected using a self-administered five-level Likert type questionnaire from 31 public universities in Kenya. Out of the 115 questionnaires that were distributed, 110 were returned and were found to be usable providing a 71% response rate. Descriptive statistics and linear regression analysis were used

to analyze the data, which was presented descriptively and analytically, using tables and graphs, incorporating percentages, standard deviations and means.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study using descriptive statistics and inferential statistics are discussed in this section.

Descriptive Statistics

The objective of the study was to establish the influence of strategic human resource management practices on performance of public universities in Kenya. The study identified four strategic human resource management practices from the empirical and theoretical literature. The studies included Zehir, Gurol, Karaboga and Kole (2016), Moustaghfir, El Fatihi and Benouarrek (2020), as well as Ojokuku and Akanbi (2015). The identified practices were rigorous recruitment, staff training, reward management and performance management.

The four typical strategic human resource management practices were purposively selected based on their significance in influencing the performance of organizations as evidenced by empirical literature.

A five level Liker type scale, numbered 5, 4, 3, 2 and 1, representing strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree and strongly disagree respectively was used for data collection. Data was collected using sections 1.0 to 4.3 of a questionnaire. Statements pertaining to the four strategic human resource management practices were put to the respondents, who were asked to respond accordingly. The findings under each of the four indicators, namely, rigorous recruitment, staff training, reward management and performance management are presented on Table 1, and discussed as per section and statement.

Section 1.0, collected data on rigorous recruitment as an indicator of strategic human resource management practices. Three indicator statements were posed to the respondents who were requested to indicate their perceptions on each, with respect to rigorous recruitment as a practice in the respective universities. Statement 1.1, requested respondents to indicate the extent to which they perceived that their university strictly adhered to the prescribed or customized recruitment and selection policy in hiring staff. It was found that 6(5%) strongly agreed, 43(39%) agreed, 20(18%) neither agreed nor disagreed, 27(25%) respondents disagreed, while 14(13%) strongly disagreed with the statement that their university strictly adhered to the prescribed or customized recruitment and selection policy in hiring staff, implying that a total of 41(38%) disagreed.

On statement 1.2, the respondents were asked to indicate whether hiring was based on elaborate job descriptions of the vacant positions by the universities. It was found that 4(4%) strongly agreed, 12(10%) agreed, and 37(34%) neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement that hiring was based on elaborate job descriptions of the vacant positions by the universities, 42(38%) disagreed, while 15(14%) strongly disagreed with the statement that hiring was based on elaborate job descriptions of the vacant positions by the universities. Hence, in total the majority, 57(52%) did not perceive that hiring was based on elaborate job descriptions of the vacant positions by the universities. On this indicator of rigorous recruitment, therefore, the findings showed that, the majority, though slight (52%), did not perceive that hiring was based on elaborate job descriptions of the vacant positions by the universities. The implication was

that, because a majority of the respondents negatively perceived hiring in terms of the use of job description in hiring, this possibly and negatively impacted them, in terms of their level of commitment, motivation and teamwork (employee outcomes). Consequently, it may be argued, that the expected impact of rigorous recruitment as a strategic human resource management practice is diminished, in terms of influencing university performance.

On the statement 1.3, the respondents were asked to indicate how they perceived the proposition that merit, rather than nepotism counted in the recruitment processes at their universities. It was found that 8(7%) strongly agreed, 8(7%) agreed, while 21(19%) neither agreed nor disagreed. In contradiction, 45(42%) disagreed, while 28(25%) strongly disagreed. Hence, in total, 73(67%) disagreed with the statement that merit, rather than nepotism counted in the recruitment processes at the universities. On whether merit rather than nepotism counted in the recruitment process, as an indicator of rigorous recruitment, it was established that the majority 73(67) did not perceived as such.

These findings, on the three indicators of rigorous recruitment as a strategic human resource management practice, showed that except for adherence to the prescribed or customized recruitment and selection policy in hiring staff, where the majority of respondents (62%) agreed, the respondents mainly disagreed with the other two indicators. This is evidenced by the finding that 52% disagreed that hiring was based on elaborate job descriptions of the vacant positions by the universities. Similarly, 67% disagreed with the statement that merit rather than nepotism counted in the recruitment process at the universities. On the whole, therefore, rigorous recruitment as a strategic human resource management practices, does not appear to have been strongly implemented, based on the indicators used in this study. It would appear that rigorous recruitment as a strategic practice in the universities exists, though not as successfully implemented, and therefore, not as impactful as could have been desired. For staff training, as a strategic human resource management practice, and as provided for in section 2.0 of the questionnaire, three indicator statements were used to aid the respondents indicate their perception on the extent to which staff training was impactful.

On statement 2.1, proposing that the universities adhered to an elaborate training and development policy, it was found that the respondents 4(4%) strongly agreed, 19(18%) agreed, while 19(18%) neither agreed nor disagreed, 50(44%) disagreed, while 18(16%) strongly disagreed with the same statement. Hence, in total, 68(60%) disagreed. Overall, therefore, the majority disagreed with the indicator that the universities adhered to an elaborate training and development policy. Section 2.2 posed an indicator statement, proposing that induction training was strategically provided for new and also promoted workers. The respondents were asked to indicate how they perceived this statement, using a five level Likert scale type questionnaire. It was found that 4(4%) strongly agreed, 8(7%) agreed, while 19(17%) neither agreed nor disagreed with this statement. In contrast, 60 (55%) disagreed, while 19(17%) strongly disagreed. Hence, a total of 79(72%) disagreed with the proposition that induction training was strategically provided for new and also promoted workers. Hence, on this indicator of staff training as a strategic human resource management practice, the majority of respondents (72%), seemed to disagree, implying that the implemented staff training strategy was substantially not impactful, as measured through induction training as an indicator.

Statement 2.3, measured the perception of the respondents with regard to whether continuous professional career development for all categories of employees was adequately provided by their universities. Using the five level Likert scale questionnaire, it was found that 2(2%), strongly agreed, 5(4%) agreed and 19(18%) neither agreed nor disagreed. However, it was found that 56(51) disagreed, while 28(24%) of the respondents strongly disagreed. Hence, in total 84(75%), were not in supportive of this statement.

From these findings, concerning staff training as a strategic human resource management practice, it was found that the majority of respondents in each of the indicators seemed not to perceive the strategic training in terms of its impact and adequately. However, it appears, at the same time, that a sizeable number in each case of the three indicators, seemed to be supportive, implying a possible, however, moderately low, impact existence, on the part of employees of the universities, from strategic staff training as a strategic human resource management practice.

For reward management as a strategic human resource management practice, and as provided for in section 3.0 of the questionnaire, three indicator statements were used to aid the respondents indicate their perception on the extent to which reward management as impactful.

Three statements were used to aid the respondents indicate their perceptions on the extent to which reward management as a strategic human resource management practice was impactful. A five level Likert scale was used.

On statement 3.1, proposing that job promotion as well as upward mobility were part of the rewarding mechanisms in the universities, it was found that 7(6%) of the respondents strongly agreed, 13(12%) agreed, while 8(7%) neither agreed nor disagreed, 55(50%) disagreed, while 27(25%) strongly disagreed with this statement. Hence, in total 82(75%) disagreed on job promotion and upward mobility as an indicator of reward management as a strategic human resource management practice, implying that the respondents did not perceive that this was provided for in their universities.

On statement 3.2, the respondents were asked to indicate their perceptions on the statement that the terms of service and benefits were motivating to employees in the universities. It was found out that 5(6%) strongly agreed, 12(10%) agreed, while 10(9%) neither agreed nor disagreed, it was established that 55(50%) disagreed, while 28(25%) strongly disagreed. Hence, in total, it was established that 83(75%) of the respondents did not perceive that the terms of service and benefits provided were motivating to employees in the universities. This implied that on terms of service and benefits provided, as an indicator of strategic reward management practice, the majority did not agree.

On statement 3.3, the respondents were asked to indicate their perception on the statement that there were other university-driven incentive schemes other than those stipulated by the statutory government scheme. It was established that 2(2%) of the respondents strongly agreed, 9(8%) agreed, while 15(14%) neither agreed nor disagreed, 58 (53%) disagreed, while 26(23%) strongly disagreed. This meant that in total, 84(76%) were not supportive of the statement that there were other university-driven incentive schemes other than those stipulated by the statutory government scheme. On the existence of university-initiated incentives other than those stipulated in the statutory terms of service, and as an indicator of strategic reward

management, the majority disagreed that these did not exist. Based on these findings concerning reward management as a strategic human resource management practice, it was found that the majority of respondents in each of the indicators seemed not to perceive the strategic reward management, in terms of its impact and adequately, as measured through the three statement indicators.

Performance management as a strategic human resource management practice, was measured through three statements which were posed to the respondents. As illustrated on section 4.0, the statements were designed to aid the respondents indicate their perceptions regarding the extent to which they felt that performance management was adequately catered for and impactful. Using a five level Likert type scale, the findings under statement 4.1 the respondents were requested to indicate the extent to which they agreed with the statement that communication is well done with appropriate feedback between supervisors and their subordinates in the universities. The results showed that 3(3%) strongly agreed, 16(15%) agreed and 16(15%) neither agreed nor disagreed, 46(41%) disagreed, while 29(26%) strongly disagreed. In total, hence, 75(67%) did not perceive that this was the case.

Under statement 4.2, the respondents were asked to indicate their perceptions on whether the performance appraisal systems in their universities were well defined accurate, fair, objective and reliable. It was established that 4(4%) strongly agreed, 10(9%) agreed, 47(43%) disagreed, with 32(29%) strongly disagreed.

This meant that in total, 79(72%) did not perceive that performance appraisal systems were well define, accurate, fair, objective and reliable based on this indicator.

On statement 4.3, the respondents were asked to indicate their perceptions regarding the statement that the performance evaluation system in their universities provided a linkage to the training and development programs as well as a mentoring system for junior employees. It was established that 4(4%) strongly agreed, 9(8%) agreed, 15(14%) neither agreed nor disagreed, 52(47%) disagreed, and 31(27%) strongly disagreed. This implied that in total, a majority of 83(74%) were not supportive of this statement and did not perceive, as measured through this indicator, that performance management as a strategic human resource management practice, was impactful. Table 1 provides a breakdown of the respective responses per variable of the strategic human resource management practices as bundle, and hence a composite variable.

Table 1: Responses on Strategic Human Resource Management Practices

| NO | STRATEGIC HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PRACTICES | N | Strongly Agree | Agree | Neither Agree nor Disagree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree | Total | Mean | Standard Deviation |
|------------|---|-----|----------------|----------|----------------------------|----------|-------------------|----------|------|--------------------|
| 1.0 | Rigorous Recruitment | N | | | | | | | | |
| 1 | My university strictly adheres to the prescribed or customized recruitment and selection policy in hiring staff | 110 | 6 (5%) | 43 (39%) | 20 (18%) | 27 (25%) | 14 (13%) | 110 100% | 2.95 | 1.12 |
| 1.2 | Hiring is based on elaborate job descriptions of the vacant positions | 110 | 4 (4%) | 12 (10%) | 37 (34%) | 42 (38%) | 15 (14%) | 110 100% | 2.41 | .941 |
| 1.3 | Merit, rather than nepotism counts in the recruitment process | 110 | 8 (7%) | 8 (7%) | 21 (19%) | 45 (42%) | 28 (25%) | 110 100% | 2.37 | 1.04 |
| 2.0 | Staff Training | | | | | | | | | |
| 2.1 | The university adheres to an elaborate training and development policy. | 110 | 4 (4%) | 19 (18%) | 19 (18%) | 50 (44%) | 18 (16%) | 110 100% | 2.42 | 1.01 |
| 2.2 | Induction training is strategically provided for new and also promoted workers | 110 | 4 (4%) | 8 (7%) | 19 (17%) | 60 (55%) | 19 (17%) | 110 100% | 2.14 | .800 |
| 2.3 | Continuous professional career development for all categories of employees is adequately provided | 110 | 2 (2%) | 5 (4%) | 19 (18%) | 56 (51%) | 28 (24%) | 110 100% | 1.96 | .74 |
| 3.0 | Reward Management | | | | | | | | | |
| 3.1 | Job promotion as well as upward mobility are part of the rewarding mechanisms in the university | 110 | 7 (6%) | 13 (12%) | 8 (7%) | 55 (50%) | 27 (25%) | 110 100% | 2.16 | 1.07 |
| 3.2 | The terms of service and benefits are motivating to employees in the university | 110 | 5 (6%) | 12 (10%) | 10 (9%) | 55 (50%) | 28 (25%) | 110 100% | 2.10 | .100 |
| 3.3 | There are other university-driven incentive schemes other than those stipulated by the statutory government scheme | 110 | 2 (2%) | 9 (8%) | 15 (14%) | 58 (53%) | 26 (23%) | 110 100% | 2.04 | .81 |
| 4.0 | Performance Management | | | | | | | | | |
| 4.1 | Communication is well done with appropriate feedback between supervisors and their subordinates in the university | 110 | 3 (3%) | 16 (15%) | 16 (15%) | 46 (41%) | 29 (26%) | 110 100% | 2.19 | 1.04 |
| 4.2 | The performance appraisal system in the university is well defined, accurate, fair, objective and reliable | 110 | 4 (4%) | 10 (9%) | 17 (15%) | 47 (43%) | 32 (29%) | 110 100% | 2.05 | .93 |
| 4.3 | The performance evaluation system in the university provides a link to the training and development programs as well as a mentoring system for the junior employees | 110 | 4 (4%) | 9 (8%) | 15 (14%) | 52 (47%) | 31 (27%) | 110 100% | 1.92 | .85 |

Source: Research Data (2022)

This study sought to determine the extent to which strategic human resource management practices may influence the performance of public universities, as the dependent variable. Five indicators of university performance, as conceptualized in this study, and as supported by empirical literature, including Kallio & Kallio & Grossi (2017) and Hamadamin & Atan (2019), were used. The indicators were new programmes, research publications, student enrolment rates, student graduation rates and staff promotion rates. For this purpose, indicator statements, each of which were intended to aid the respondents indicate their perception in relation to the respective indicators were posed to the respondents. Sections 5.0 – 9.1, were used. Based on the five level Likert type scale, the respondents were asked to indicate their perceptions on each indicator statement with respect to the performance of their respective universities.

Under section 5.0, of the questionnaire, data was collected on new programmes as an indicator of public universities' performance. Statement 5.1, was used, where the respondents were asked to indicate their perceptions on the extent to which they agreed that the number of programmes in their respective universities had been increasing over the previous five years. It was found that 11(10%) strongly agreed, 37(34%) agreed, 29(26%) neither agreed nor disagreed, 28(26%) disagreed, while 5(4%) strongly disagreed, implying that in total, 33(30%) did not perceive that the number of programmes in the universities had been increasing over the previous five years. Hence, on whether the number of programmes in the universities had been increasing over the previous five years, the majority of the respondents 77(70%) agreed.

Under section 6.0, of the questionnaire, data was collected on research publications as an indicator of performance of public universities in Kenya. Statement 6.1, was used, where the respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed that the number of research publications by faculty had been increasing over the previous few years. Based on the five level Likert type scale, it was established that 8(7%) strongly agreed, 10(9%) agreed, while 39(36%) neither agreed nor disagreed, 42(38%) disagreed, while 11(10%) strongly disagreed. This meant that in total, 53(48%) did not perceive that research publications by faculty had been increasing over the previous five years. Hence, on research publications as an indicator of performance of public universities, the majority of respondents 57(52%), indicated that the number of research publication by faculty had been increasing over the previous five years.

Under section 7.0, of the questionnaire, data was collected on student enrolment rates, as an indicator of performance of public universities in Kenya. Statement 7.1, was used, where the respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed that student enrollment rates had been increasing for the previous five years in their universities. Based on the five level Likert type scale, it was established that 8(7%) strongly agreed, 40(36%) agreed, while 24(22%) neither agreed nor disagreed, 31(29%) disagreed, while 7(6%), strongly disagreed. This meant that in total, 38(35%) did not perceive that student enrollment rates had been increasing for the previous five years in their universities. Hence, on whether the student enrollment rates had been increasing for the previous five years in their universities, and as an indicator of university performance, the majority 72(69%) positively perceived that student enrollment rates had been increasing for the previous five years in the universities.

Under section 8.0 of the questionnaire, data was collected on student graduation rates, as an indicator of performance of public universities. Statement 8.1 was used, where the respondents

were asked to indicate the extent to which they perceived that their universities had been graduating increasing number of students for the previous five years. Based on the five level Likert type scale, it was established that 9(8%) strongly agreed, 19(17%) agreed while 32(29%) neither agreed nor disagreed, 37(34%) disagreed, while 13(12%) strongly disagreed.

This implied that in total, 50(46%) did not perceive that their universities had been graduating increasing number of students for the previous five years. Hence, on whether the universities had been graduating increasing number of students for the previous five years, and as an indicator of public universities performance.

It was established that the majority of the respondents 60(54%) did perceive that their universities had been graduating increasing number of students for the previous five years.

Under section 9.0 of the questionnaire, data was collected on staff promotion rates as an indicator of performance of public universities. Statement 9.1, was used, where the respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which, in their universities the number of staff promoted had been increasing over time. Based on the five level Likert type scale, it was established that 5(4%), strongly agreed, 8(7%) agreed, and 19(17%), neither agreed nor disagreed, 41(38%) disagreed, while 37(34%) strongly disagreed, implying that in total, 78(72%) did not perceive that the number of staff promoted had been increasing over time. Hence, on whether the universities had been promoting staff increasingly, and as an indicator of performance of public universities, the majority of respondents 78(72%), did not agree. Table 2 presents a summary of these findings.

Table 2: Descriptive Responses on Performance of Universities

| NO. | PERFORMANC E OF PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES | | Strongly Agree | Agree | Neither Agree nor Disagree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree | Total | Mean | Standard Deviation |
|------------|--|-----|----------------|-------------|-------------------------------|-------------|----------------------|-------------|------|-----------------------|
| 5.0 | New Programs | N | | | | | | | | |
| 5.1 | The number of programs/courses in my university have been increasing for the last five years | 110 | 11 (10%) | 37 (34%) | 29 (26%) | 28 (26%) | 5 (4%) | 110 100% | 3.2 | 1.0 |
| 6.0 | Research Publications | | | | | | | | | |
| 6.1 | The number of research publications by faculty have been increasing over the last five years | 110 | 8 (7%) | 10 (9%) | 39 (36%) | 42 (38%) | 11 (10%) | 110 100% | 2.7 | 0.9 |
| 7.0 | Student Enrolment Rates | | | | | | | | | |
| 7.1 | Student enrollment rates have been increasing for the last five years in my university | 110 | 8 (7%) | 40 (36%) | 24 (22%) | 31 (29%) | 7 (6%) | 110 100% | 3.1 | 1.0 |
| 8.0 | Student Graduation Rates | | | | | | | | | |
| 8.1 | My university has been graduating increasing number of graduates for the last five years | 110 | 9 (8%) | 19 (17%) | 32 (29%) | 37 (34%) | 13 (12%) | 110 100% | 2.8 | 1.1 |
| 9.0 | Employee Promotion Rates | | | | | | | | | |
| 9.1 | In my university the number of staff promoted has been increasing over time | 110 | 5 (4%) | 8 (7%) | 19 (17%) | 41 (38%) | 37 (34%) | 110 100% | 2.0 | 1.0 |

Source: Research Data (2022)

These findings seem to be supported by the various government reports relating to the performance of state entities in Kenya, and in this case, the public universities. For instance; Salaries and Remuneration Commission (SRC) Report (2016), Auditor General (Kenya) Reports (2019- 2021), and Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS) Economic Survey (2022), all of which have reported that public universities in Kenya had been declining in terms of performance. Even more supportive of the findings of this study, was the report that there were pertinent challenges facing public universities. These included, lack of research infrastructure and lack of qualified human resources, among others (Commission for University Education (CUE) (2018), It would appear, therefore, that this study is resonating with the practical and actual performance environment dynamics currently existing in the public universities in Kenya, as indicated by performance indicators measured herein, and the findings made on the same.

Regression Analysis

Regression of performance of public universities on strategic human resource management practices as a composite variable was conducted. The objective of this study was to measure the influence of strategic human resource management practices as one composite variable (rigorous recruitment, staff training, reward management and performance management) on performance of public universities in Kenya. To achieve this objective, the respondents from the public universities in Kenya were asked to respond to several questions formulated as statements, on strategic human resource management practices and performance of their respective universities. In this study, the bundle of strategic human resource management practices was conceptualized in terms of rigorous recruitment, staff training, reward management and performance management. Performance of public universities in Kenya was conceptualized in terms of new programmes, research publications, student enrolment rate, student graduation rates and employee promotion rates. A five level Likert type scale, corresponding to a range of 5 (strongly agree), 4 (agree), 3 (neither agree nor disagree), 2 (disagree) and 1 (strongly disagreed) was used.

Based on the objective of the study the hypothesis; H01 Strategic human resource management practices do not influence performance of public universities in Kenya was formulated and tested. The model which was used for linear regression was $Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 K_1 + \varepsilon$, where Y = performance of public universities in Kenya, β_0 = Constant, β_1 = coefficient of the independent variable (SHRMPs), and e = error term. The results of the regression analysis, based on objective and hypothesis, are presented on Table 3.

Table 3: Regression Results for Strategic Human Resource Management Practices and performance of Public Universities

| Model Summary | | | | | |
|--|-----------------------------|-----------|--------------------------------|---------------------------|-------|
| Model | R | R square | Adjusted R Square | Std Error of the Estimate | |
| 1 | 0.665 | 0.421 | .302 | 0.2402496 | |
| Predictors: (Constant), SHRMPs; rigorous recruitment, staff training, reward management, performance management. Dependent Variable – Performance of Public Universities | | | | | |
| Anova | | | | | |
| Model | Sum of Squares | Df | Mean Square | F | Sig |
| Regression | 6.235 | 2 | 1.559 | 26.002 | 0.000 |
| Residual | 7.850 | 128 | 0.058 | | |
| Total | 14.085 | 141 | | | |
| Predictors: (Constant) – SHRMPs; rigorous recruitment, staff training, reward management, performance management Dependent variable – Performance of Public Universities | | | | | |
| Coefficients | | | | | |
| Model | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standardized Coefficients Beta | T | Sig |
| | B | Std Error | | | |
| Constant | 1.680 | 0.130 | | 12.889 | .000 |
| SHRMPs | 0.325 | 0.049 | 0.552 | 7.795 | .000 |
| Predictors: (Constant), – SHRMPs; rigorous recruitment, staff training, reward management, performance management Dependent Variable – Performance of Public Universities | | | | | |

Source: Research Data (2022)

From Table 3, the adjusted R Square is .302, implying that strategic human resource management practices together accounted for 30% of the change in the performance of public universities. The F (2, 128) statistics was 26.002 with a P-value .000 (P value < 0.05). Likewise, the Beta coefficient for the bundle of strategic human resource management practices was .425 with P-value at .000 (P-value < 0.05). This implied that 70% of the change in the dependent variable, that is performance of public universities, was caused by other factors other than strategic human resource management practices. This implied that any unit change in the bundle of strategic human resource management practices was likely to lead to .325 (33%) change in the performance of public universities. The results can be summarized as per the

regression model: $Y = 1.680 + 0.325X_i + \epsilon$.

This finding is consistent with empirical literature reviewed. For instance, Al-Khaled, Akram & Chung, Jee Fenn (2020), studied strategic human resource management practices and organizational performance, and found that entities which adopted strategic human resource management practices were able to sustainably improve their performance. However, this study was not contextualized in the public sector, nor in public universities. Eneh and Awara (2016), using a cross-sectional descriptive study, investigated strategic human resource management practices and organizational growth.

They found that the use of strategic human resource management practices did influence organization performance. However, this study was contextualized in national universities in Ghana. Ojokuu and Akanbi (2015), studied strategic human resource management practices and performance of Nigerian public universities, and found that using SHRM practices had beneficially impacted the public universities in terms of attraction of more researching sponsorships, increasing scholarly writings and research-based innovations. However, this study was contextualized in Nigeria rather than Kenya. Similarly, in Kenya, Naitore & Wanyoike (2019), used a descriptive survey design to study the impact of strategic human resource management practices on performance of public universities in Kenya. They found that there was a positive and significant relationship linking strategic human resource management practices and performance, in terms of HR planning and staffing. However, this study was confined to HR planning and staffing practices, as opposed to recruitment, staff training, reward management and performance management.

Similarly, Mutahi & Busienei (2015), used a descriptive design to investigate the influence of strategic human resource management practice on performance of public universities in Kenya, finding that the practices affected performance of the public universities, in terms of strategic rewarding and strategic training. However, this study confined itself to reward and training practices, as opposed to the bundle of four; rigorous recruitment, staff training, reward management and performance management as undertaken in the current study.

The findings of this study are also in line with the Resource Based Theory (RBT), by Barney (2001), which postulated that business entities needed to focus internally to activate resources, the most important one of which is the people within. It is the people as a resource that would enable such entities to achieve complete advantage in their operations. This empirical finding, regarding the positive influence of strategic human resource management practices on performance of public universities in Kenya, implies that, the public universities have to take deliberate measures in determining and selecting appropriate SHRMPs. Such practices, according to the RBT, are expected to be valuable, inimitable, and rare and may not be substitutable, in ensuring that public universities, like any other organizations, are able to sustainably achieve competitive advantage in their markets.

This is further corroborated by the findings of Sagwa, K'Obonyo and Ogutu (2014), who averred that investing in human resources was crucial in promoting organizational performance.

Conclusion

Based on the objectives and findings of this study, it is concluded that strategic human resource management practices, entailing rigorous recruitment, staff training, reward management and performance management have a positive and statistically significant influence on the performance of Kenya's public universities. Hence, bearing in mind that the universities have to utilize, like other organizations, need to implement strategic bundles of human resource management practices, are likely to develop and deliver more learning programmes, achieve increased enrolment rates, increase graduation rates, generate more research projects, grants and publications, as well as enhance the much-sought-after staff promotion rates.

Recommendations

This study recommends that national universities consider strategically implementing human resource management practices, selecting the most relevant practice out of many potential practices as evidenced in empirical and theoretical literature. With respect to this study, a possible bundle, as supported the findings, may include; rigorous recruitment, staff training, reward management and performance management. A strategic implementation of this bundle would ensure, as far as each respective strategic practice is concerned, that the universities strictly adhered to the prescribed or customized recruitment and selection policy in hiring staff, using merit, rather than nepotism.

In training, that the universities would adhere to an elaborate training and development policy, embracing induction training for the benefit of new and also promoted workers, in such a way that continuous professional career development for all categories of employees would be adequately provided for. In reward management, the universities would ensure that Job promotion as well as upward mobility are part of the rewarding mechanisms, seeing to it that the terms of service and benefits readily motivated employees, and that they innovatively and creatively instituted other university-driven incentive schemes other than those stipulated by the statutory government schemes.

Likewise, for performance management, the universities would embrace the all-important communication to enhance appropriate feedback between supervisors and their subordinates, while at the same time re-invigorate performance appraisal system to make it well-defined, accurate, fair, objective and reliable, and not forgetting the foundational linkage from the performance appraisal to all the other strategic practices, especially training and reward management. In other words, the universities ought to creatively go beyond the statutory and regulatory provisions as provided by under the Universities Act and the Commission for University Education (CUE).

Areas for Further Study

It is suggested that further and confirmatory studies may help to affirm or otherwise, the results of this study. In addition, it would be interesting to compare the outcomes of another study using the same variables, but this time, to focus on private rather than public universities in Kenya.

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