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EFFECT OF AGEING WORKFORCE ON PERFORMANCE OF ACADEMIC STAFF AT KENYATTA UNIVERSITY

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Abstract

Purpose: To explore the effect of ageing workforce on performance of academic staff of Kenyatta University.

Methodology: The study used desktop literature review and focused on previously published journals that looked at ageing workforce performance of academic staffs in public universities. A total of 13 journals were found relating to ageing and performance of employees. The theories underpinning the study were human capital theory, stereotyping and prejudice theory and goal setting theory.

Findings: The results from literature review found that various aspects of ageing workforce influence performance in different ways. It was found that aged academic staff members of Kenyatta University were vital in implementation of decisions and getting the right resources for the institution to progress while younger employees were handy in decision execution and tasks which required extra energy. It was also revealed that knowledge and experience have significant and direct impact on academic staff performance. This created a particular concept that older staff are more suited and perform better at roles which put them in positions to guide and influence.

Unique contribution to theory, practice and policy: To address the implications of the ageing workforce on academic staff performance at Kenyatta University, the university should aim at identifying and assessing the potential impact of the ageing workforce. Some of the applicable techniques are age profile and retirement data focusing on performance of academic staff. The critical focus should be putting considerable effort on retaining and recruiting younger workforce. The focus should also aim at managing retirement through phased retirement guidelines. In modelling of these practices, the institution should take into consideration mature and aged staff who can serve in critical skill areas. Additionally, some of the aged teaching staff are indispensable and therefore the university needs to set strategies where these skills and expertise can be passed down to younger teaching staff. This will increase focus on knowledge continuity where older teaching staff take on mentoring roles in support of the younger staff.

Keywords: Ageing workforce, performance, academic staff and Kenyatta University.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

The success of universities largely depends on the faithfulness, solid functioning and involved academicians regarding high level of teaching. The provision of workforce to the various sectors in the country is possible only through institutions of higher level of learning, with high level of organizational commitment and educational standards on the part of the staff members especially the academicians. In universities the most significant foundation for the education development is the workforce (Thakur, 2013). Agreeing with this consideration, the academic excellence and teaching is enhanced by the level of performance of the workforce in the university.

At Kenyatta University, there are two categories of staff members: Academic members of staff, which comprises of teaching members of staff whose primary role is to teach, research, training and supervision of students. Their hierarchy is as follows: Full Professors, Associate Professors, Senior Lecturers, Lecturers, Assistant Lecturers and the lowest is the Tutorial Fellow Position. The second category is of non-teaching members of staff who also fall under two categories: Senior non- teaching staff members Grade (5-14), this cadre of staff comprises of staff members who have various professional skills examples are the Secretaries, Accountants, Electricians, and Computer Technicians etc. Junior non-teaching staff members Grade (1-4), this cadre of staff are the subordinate staffs who carry out various duties at the Institution.

The ageing academic staff of Kenyatta University academic staff creates concerns for workforce planning which are in the context of changes in the laws governing retirement age. Majority of the senior management in the university are workers from baby boom generation. The underlying effect of aged academic staff can be widely seen although the issue has been rhetorically discussed and investigated in many human resource policy studies. Among the constructs studied are cost of healthcare, retirement savings, impacts on social welfare system among others, however, important aspects of the ageing workforce such as performance has largely been omitted. While the benefits of having such workforce is crystal clear evident, the challenges and the impact on performance have been scantly debated. Controversial debates have emerged in the last couple of years on the performance and contributions of the ageing workforce. According to Henkens (2012), extending peoples' working life is viewed as the crucial element in drawing upon the skills, knowledge and expertise. However, there is also counterview on the increasing aged workforce with researchers citing the increasing cost and the decrease in performance partly due to emergence of technology.

Different outlooks and experiences could give rise to increased interpersonal conflicts at Kenyatta University. Van Dalen et al., (2014) noted that one key element in managing the interpersonal conflicts at work is understanding attitudes towards older workers. International research has shown that most of these attitudes are based on stereotypes that older staffs are less motivated, more resistant, harder to train and less adaptable to change resulting to decline in performance. These views may be inaccurate basing on the fact that what constitutes an older staff is unclear, with most definitions relating to people over 40 years of age and others over 60 years of age. Old academic staff also holds these stereotypes compounding to negative impact of academic participation and performance as well as creating a divisive culture. Additionally, the bias also extends to recruitment and selection process creating barriers to entry for older people. Yet studies have shown that older academic staff is more efficient due to prolonged experience, more knowledgeable about occupational needs and challenges and therefore more capable of noticing potentially dangerous situations and responding to hazards (Wang & Shi, 2014). Furthermore, the advice and watchful eye of aged academic workforce can offset the careless tendencies of the younger academic staffs which often results from lack of experience or knowledge and recklessness in handling serious matters pertaining to academics and the welfare of institution.

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While the benefits of aged academic staffs are easily noticed at Kenyatta University, there are also problems looming regarding ageing staffs. Among the problems faced in Kenyatta University is that the amount of younger employees who can replace the older academic staff is decreasing. Additionally, if the Kenyan government plans to increase the retirement age of the workers, the university has to manage the old academic staff that had their retirement plans already in place. This means that in some cases, workers cannot proceed to retire as planned and this can cause demotivation hence increasing the rates of absenteeism and consequently decrease their productivity levels (Taylor & Earl, 2016).

According to the Kenyan Labour commission, about one quarter of Kenyans over 55 years of age experienced some sort of age discrimination in the last couple of years and four out of 10 Kenyan organizations have admitted that they wouldn't employ a person over 65 years. This has resulted to some form of universal law whereby people who think of themselves as old leave the workforce. Essentially, age is a more complicated issue and Kenyatta University as well as other public university need to be transparent and ensure that their performance systems are bias free and fair.

A person's performance and work ability declines with age. Both mental function and physical fitness become impaired. The bodily ageing process varies from one person to other depending on the factors which accelerate it or slow it down. Therefore, it is very difficult to point the exact age or moment when a person's age takes toll on his or her performance. According to Australian labour commission reports, improved living conditions can prolong the life span and also extend the time of efficient operations. Individuals of the same calendar year may differ in their biological and also in their ability to function in society. Hence, in assessing the aging workforce in Kenyatta University, one should also be able to define both the function age which is measured by the number of calendar years one has lived and also by his or her mental and physical acumen (Harris *et al.*, 2017)

It is also worthwhile to note that university education is not just another level of learning process but it is critical component of human development and an avenue to solve societal problems. The increasing importance of knowledge is the main driver of development, information and communication revival. By shedding light on the issue of performance and age debates, Kenyatta University and other institutions will acknowledge the present and future challenges hence enable them discuss suitable solutions to address problems relating to ageing workforce and performance of academic staff at the institution. Therefore, this paper is timely and germane since it informs about the extent at which the university can communicatively respond to the increasingly pressing issue of old academic staff and their impact on performance. Of practical importance, this study offers recommendations on how the institution can adopt a more inclusive approach and enhance performance needed to cope with the unending academic and societal issues.

1.1 Objective of the Study

The aim of this paper is to explore the impact of ageing workforce on academic staff performanceatKenyatta University.

1.2 Hypothesis

H₁: Ageing workforce has a significant influence on academic staff performance of Kenyatta University

2. 0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Human capital theory

Human capital theory advanced by Schutz (1961) and extensively developed by Becker (1964) is well suited to discuss the impact of ageing workforce on performance of academic staff in

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Kenyatta University. The theory posits that knowledge and skills of a worker, generate a certain stock of productive capital. The current world of work puts the importance of human capital at center of the current organization environment. Attracting and retaining intellectual capital a cadre of highly skilled employee with idiosyncratic skill is essential. Therefore organizations must move from human resource to the notion of human capital (Grobler *et al.*, 2006). The theory posits that the knowledge and skill a worker has to generate a certain stock of productive capital (Becker & Weismann, 2009).

This approach also sees people not as an expense item on their income statements rather as an asset capable of not adding to their organizations but also in some cases ensuring its survival in the current competitive environment (lynch, 2004). Human as capital assets comprises of intellectual capital unique to skills and knowledge of each particular person, social capital which is the flexible networks that allow the organization to function seamlessly and the emotional capital which is the ability to convert the potential in intellectual capital into committed realized action. Human capital in the organizations is the combined knowledge, skills and expertise which gives the organization its distinctive attributes. The elements of the human factor are those of capacity to learn, change, innovate, and provide creative thrust that if properly motivated can bring long term sustainability and survival of the organization (Porter & Steer, 1992).

Therefore, according to this theory, aged workforce is key employee basing on their level of knowledge expertise and network connection internally and externally which makes the organization function seamlessly. They possess a considerable amount of institution's value and when these staff leaves the institution, they take this value with them, that is, why focus has been to retain and attract the old aged workforce while developing the young and talented employees. Hence, this theory is useful in explaining the ageing workforce on performance of academic staff of Kenyatta University

2.2 Stereotyping and Prejudice Theory

Stereotyping and prejudice theory proposed by Pitts (2009) is crucial for the development of study particularly on the notions concerning performance perceptions of the aged workforce. According to the theory, stereotype is defined as the over-generalized and fixed belief about a particular group of people. Although stereotypes are important in responding to situations due to shared experiences, the main drawback is that it makes people ignore differences and make unjust generalizations about others which might be wrong. Stereotyping in workplace creates inferences that an employee has a range of attributes and abilities that members of particular group are assumed to possess. These inferences raise the issues of social categorization which forms prejudiced attitudes that cause people to develop out-groups or in-groups.

Workplace prejudice and stereotyping can result to discrimination of a person or a group of people based on a certain range of characteristics. Such instances create a poor working atmosphere that may end up demoralizing the victim. The effects can cause the victim to lose focus and morale which directly impacts on the productivity of the individual (Nayab, 2010). The individual may end up feeling unworthy, which can cause a loss in self-esteem and motivation. The productivity or performance of such a person is likely to drop. He further indicates that workplace prejudice and discrimination is a major cause of unemployment. People stay unemployed because of biasness in hiring companies or organizations. This biasness impacts on workplace diversity management which creates a ripple effect on performance.

Uwlax (2003) also introduced four theories describing the formation of prejudices among individuals. These were normative theory, scapegoating theory, exploitation theory, and authoritarian-personality theory. On normative theory, the author observes that one's family, 15 friends, and community will be responsible for the creation and reinforcement of prejudices. In the scapegoating theory, people formed prejudices based on their need to apportion blame on a minority group for personal shortcomings and misfortunes. Uwlax observes that the exploitation theory describes the prejudices formed by individuals as a result of conflicting economic

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interests. These conflicting interests cause people to justify actions that would discriminate against other ethnic groups with whom they are in competition. Finally, authoritarian-personality theory described the formation of harsh prejudices based on an individual's personality of what is good or evil.

Levy (1997) introduced the stereotype embodiment theory (SET) to describe the process by which age stereotypes affect the health of older adults. This assertion was based on four main premises: that stereotypes become internalized across the lifespan; that stereotypes can operate unconsciously; that stereotypes can gain salience from self-relevance; and people could utilize multiple pathways in their stereotyping. Using these premises, Levy sought to explain why age stereotypes were internalized by older adults and how other types of self-stereotypes operated (such as ethnic stereotypes). The findings will be useful in depicting how these stereotypes, once activated in the individual's sub-conscious, would eventually have an effect on his or her health or performance.

2.3 Goal Setting Theory

The Goal Setting theory developed by Latham and Locke (1979) states that motivation and performance are higher when individuals set specific goal, when goals are difficult but accepted and when there are feedback on performance. Precipitation in goal setting is important as a means of getting agreement to the setting of higher goals. Difficult goals must be agreed and their achievement enforced by guidance and advice, finally the feedback is vital in maintaining motivation, particularly towards the achievement of even higher goals.

Goal setting theory highlights four mechanisms that connect goals to performance outcomes: They direct attention to priorities, they stimulate effort, and they challenge people to bring knowledge and skills. Goal theory is a theory that proposes that all human action and behavior are motivated by a goal which is important to the performance of organization and hence individuals. The theory established an intimate link between goal setting and positive workplace performance and it predicts that people will channel their effort towards the accomplishment of their goals, which in turn affect performance. The implementation of performance contracting focuses on the above principles. The theory assert that the goal setting strongly influence the performance of the organization and individual (Latham & Locke, 1979).

2.4 Empirical Review

Dimitriosand (2013) carried out a research study to investigate the influence of demographic characteristics on staff performance. The study employed descriptive research design and qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection were used. The study found out that older workforce is more satisfied with their jobs and this translated to high levels of job performance. This finding was supported by the fact that older employees had more bargaining power due to their organizational commitment and also held higher positions of leadership in organization hierarchies. The study also found that younger employees tend to think that older employees are slow, demotivated hence performed lesser than them. However, the study concluded that oldemployees were more efficient and had few errors as compared to the young employees who were found to be reckless.

A study by Feldman (2009) investigated the impact of age on job performance. The study employed meta-analysis on the relationship between age, educational level and dimensions of job behaviors which were counterproductive performance and task. The study found that education improves the performance of the crucial workplace tasks through equipping individuals with technical expertise and more authoritative demeanor with which they are able to complete their responsibilities. The study found that as one progressed in a particular role, given the educational requirement for that role, he or she gained extra skill and expertise through experience. Therefore, through education and experience, it is usually expected that old staff members positively correlate to task performance at the workplace. The study concluded that

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education and experience enhances cognitive ability of a person which in turn fosters job performance.

Elsaid (2012) examined the effects of cross cultural work force diversity on employee performance in Egyptian pharmaceutical organizations. The study explored the impact of gender, age, and education background on employee performance in the Egyptian pharmaceutical industry which is renowned to employ highly diversified workforce. The results indicated that only two variables, gender and education background, were significant in explaining the variance in employee performance when different work force work together, while surprisingly, age diversity does not.

Suttle (2016) conducted a research study to investigate age and lessened job performance in some roles at workplace. The study employed an explanatory research design to explain the cause and effects between the variables. The study found that as people age, they tend to lose sight, hearing and with such, duties involving listening to oral instructions or extended amount of time where they use sight is affected. Impaired vision was found to negatively correlate with performance especially when older employees have trouble reading emails, instructions or even research materials. The study was in tandem with the common notion that with age comes loss in physical strength, energy and muscle strength. The study also observes that young people lacked suitable experience which may be required in some roles and duties. The study therefore concluded that job knowledge and experience have significant and direct impact on work performance.

Matz-Costa *et al.*, (2012) investigate on the issue of workforce age diversity and performance. The study used descriptive research design. The study described a certain type of diversity which creates instant discrimination. The study found that the biggest problem relating to age diversity is when a younger, inexperienced supervisor is put in charge of the older experienced worker. Old academic staff members have higher levels of organization loyalty, harder working, better interpersonal skills and better at teamwork. The study established stereotypes among these two groups of workforce where younger workers were associated with greater absenteeism and more job-related accidents as compared to the old staff members.

Kuya (2013) carried out a study on influence of demographic characteristics on employee performance. The study investigated the older and younger workforce of the commercial banks in Kenya. The study found that age had an impact on how well an employee performs. It observed that both young and aged population performed poorly however because of different causes. The study reported that young employees made errors as a result of lack of knowledge or experience, while the older employees made errors due to mental and physical deterioration. However, considering that most of the old employees were either in managerial or directive position, theydid little on day to day tasks and their performance was largely effective in making organization decisions. Therefore, the study concluded that given the task, old workforce is better suited in advisory position in order to capitalize on their extensive knowledge.

Another study by Munjuri (2012) investigated the workforce demographic diversity and employee management in secondary schools. The study used a descriptive research design. The study found that age diversity affects the performance of the secondary schools in Kenya. It was noted that schools which were balanced in terms of older and younger employees performed better than those who whose workforce was skewed on one side. The result established that old staff members were vital when it came to implementation of decisions and getting the right resources for the school to progress while younger employees were handy in decisions execution and tasks which required extra energy such as extra-curricular activities.

In the study investigating the impact of employee age on the safe performance of production tasks in hospital network, Rembiasz (2017) revealed relationships between worker age and safety at workstations. The study used descriptive research design and observation list as well as questionnaires was used in data and information collection. The study found that worker age

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influences the speed of reaction to threats and translates into the nature and scope of improvement measures. The study established links pronounced among workers aged above 50 years. The outcome of the study was that aged workers were more likely to mistake things and therefore create errors as their consistency levels lowered and the impaired ability to perform production tasks at efficient levels.

Bertolino, Truxillo and Fraccaroli (2013), investigated how older and younger workers are perceived in terms of big five personality, task and contextual performance. Based on the Intergroup bias phenomenon, the authors also examined whether respondent age would moderate these effects. 155 participants completed the paper survey in which they were randomly assigned to rate either a "typical" younger employee or a "typical older employee." They filled out questionnaires containing measures of perceived personality factors and perceived job performance of an older or younger worker. The study found that older and younger workers were perceived differently in terms of certain Big Five personality factors and organizational citizenship behavior. These perceived differences generally reflected actual age-related differences on these variables. However, respondents' age moderated many of these effects, such that respondents' perceptions favored their own age group. The study illustrated that dimensions such as perceived Big Five personality and job performance may be useful for examining workplace age stereotypes. They also illustrate that respondent age may affect these perceptions of older and younger workers.

Uschi and Veen (2013) investigated the impact of age diversity on performance using Zurich University as the case study. The study adopted a case study research design to explain the effect of different age groups and task performance. The study found that type of task performed and the production process itself greatly mediate the relationship between age heterogeneity and firm productivity. The study also reported that routine tasks in stable environment characterized by modest-problem solving demands coordination as well as low degree of innovation required good balance between older and younger workforce. Rationalized work processes necessitate rapid, efficient and standardized communication processes, where little is gained from diversity-related competencies but much may be lost in the event of communication problems attributable to age heterogeneity. Therefore, the study established that under these circumstances, the possible benefits of age heterogeneity might not be sufficient to offset the increasing costs of age heterogeneity. The study concluded that for routine work tasks, any reduction in age heterogeneity will have a favorable effect on productivity, while every increase in age heterogeneity will reduce productivity. Empirically, this produced a significantly negative statistical coefficient between age heterogeneity and organization productivity.

Wagner and Pfeifer (2013) carried out a research study to investigate the effects of age and gender workforce composition on productivity and profits. The empirical investigations used data for manufacturing industry enterprises. The study found that employees aged 30-49 years significantly and positively correlated with productivity. The study revealed that one percentage point increase in the employment share of these middle aged workers increases productivity by approximately 204 Euros per head. The study also revealed that employment share of older workers aged 50 years or older also has a positive coefficient, although it is not statistically significant at conventional levels. The study concluded that the age-profit profiles increase until age 40 and a decline afterward.

Guglielmiet (2016) tested the relationship between job engagement and job satisfaction of the older workers measured over time. The study utilized questionnaire as the research instrument in a descriptive survey. The study found that work engagement and age were negatively and significantly associated to job satisfaction in younger workers while older workers indicated a positive correlation between job satisfaction and engagement which are the main construct of performance. The study observed that as the age increased, the negative effect of work engagement on job satisfaction weakened. The study concluded that older workers were more

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satisfied and engaging due to the reasons related to the ageing process itself such as change in personality and maturation.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

The study utilized desktop literature review and focused on previously published journals that looked at ageing workforce performance of academic staffs in public universities. A total of 13 journals were found relating to ageing and performance of employees at institutions of higher learning. Yamane (1967) formula was used to calculate the sample size.

Yamane Formula:

 $n = N/1 + N(e^2)$

Where;

n= sample size

N= size of population

e= error term of 5%

Therefore:

 $n = 13/1 + (0.05^2)$

n = 12

A sample of 12 journal was randomly selected for review. The theories underpinning of the study entailed human capital theory, stereotyping and prejudice theory and goal setting theory.

4.0 RESEARCH FINDINGS

While many studies have been done regarding demographic characteristics and diversity at workplace and their effect on overall performance, studies regarding ageing workforce and its impact on job performance have been scanty and few especially in the context of education and higher institutions of learning. A number of studies in literature review investigated the impact of age on job performance. However, the findings have been controversial and subject to further investigation particularly regarding the aging academic workforce. Wagner and Pfeifer (2013) carried out research to investigate the impact of age on performance. They found that the age-profit profiles increase until age 40 and a decline afterward. The results are in tandem with that of Rembiasz (2017) who found out that aged workers were more prone to mistakes and therefore create errors as their consistency levels lowered and the impaired ability to perform production tasks at efficient levels.

However, there were a number of studies which diverged from these findings indicating positive association between old age and performance. Study by Dimitriosand (2013) found that that old employees were more efficient and had few errors as compared to the young employees who were found to be reckless. Similarly, study by Kuya (2013) reported that young employees made errors as a result of lack of knowledge or experience, while the older employees made errors due to mental and physical deterioration. The study purported that old workforce are better suited and efficient in managerial or advisory position where they can use their knowledge and expertise to influence performance. Likewise, Munjuri (2012) established that old staff members were vital when it came to implementation of decisions and getting the right resources for the school to progress while younger employees were handy in decisions execution and tasks which required extra energy such as extra-curricular activities. These findings were supported by those of Suttle (2013) who asserted that job knowledge and experience have significant and direct impact on work performance. This created a particular concept that older staff are more suited and perform better at roles which they are in position to guide and influence.

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Some of the studies approached the issue of age and performance in context of diversity. The studies looked at how age diversity at workplace influenced performance. Uschi and Veen (2013) investigated the impact of age diversity on performance at Zurich University. It was reported that for routine work tasks, any reduction in age heterogeneity will have a favorable effect on productivity, while every increase in age heterogeneity will reduce productivity. Empirically, this produced a significantly negative statistical coefficient between age heterogeneity and organization productivity. What this means is that aged staff membersare more productive when the nature of role demands innovation. Such jobs require them to contribute to the performance of job since they are more knowledgeable and committed to the organization. Matz-Costa (2012) found that biggest problem relating to age diversity is when a younger, inexperienced supervisor is put in charge of the older experienced worker. Old staff members have higher levels of organization loyalty, harder working, better interpersonal skills and better at teamwork. Similar to findings of Uschi and Veen (2013), this finding implied that there are more factors which contribute to the performance of old staff members such as motivation and recognition. Elsaid (2012) found contradictory results regarding the age diversity at organization. He found that gender and education background, were significant in explaining the variance in employee performance when different work force work together, while surprisingly, age diversity does not.

Other studies were not conclusive enough such as that of Bertolino, Truxillo and Fraccaroli (2013) who investigated how older and younger workers are perceived in terms of big five personality, task and contextual performance. The study found that older and younger workers were perceived differently in terms of certain Big Five personality factors and organizational citizenship behavior.

The results generated from literature review found that various aspects of ageing workforce influence performance in different ways. It was purported academic staff members of Kenyatta University were vital in implementation of decisions and getting the right resources for the school to progress while younger employees were handy in decisions execution and tasks which required extra energy such as extra-curricular activities. It was also revealed that knowledge and experience have significant and direct impact on academic staff performance. This created a particular concept that older staff are more suited and perform better at roles which they are in position to guide and influence. However, the diversified findings from the literature review create more questions regarding ageing workforce and performance of academic workforce. Some of the studies found supportive findings on ageing and performance while others nullified those results. However, the results were presented under different constructs and contexts. This means that the research regarding ageing workforce and performance has not been extensively investigated hence need for further empirical research. This is partly because most of the study findings were inconclusive while others focused more on the age diversity which makes it difficult to draw conclusions.

5.0 SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

To address the implications of the ageing workforce on performance of academic staff, Kenyatta University should aim at identifying and assessing the potential impact of the ageing academic workforce. Some of the applicable techniques are age profile and retirement data focusing on performance of academic staff at Kenyatta University. The critical focus should be putting considerable effort on retaining and recruiting younger academic workforce. The focus should also aim at managing to retirement through phased retirement guidelines. In modelling of these practices, the institution should take into consideration mature and aged academic staff who can serve in critical skill areas. Additionally, some of the aged academic staff are indispensable due to their involvement in higher levels of research and supervision of research proposals at Doctoral levels and therefore, Kenyatta University need to set strategies where these skills and expertise can be passed down to younger teaching staff. This will increase focus on knowledge

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continuity where older academic staff take on mentoring roles in support of the younger academic staff.

6.0 SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The study makes the following suggestions for future researchers to perform a detailed investigation on the research areas to help shed more light on them:

- i. Impact of old workforce on performance of academic staff in Kenyatta University
- ii. Investigation of possible consequences of early and late retirements.
- How workforce diversity impacts the performance of academic staff of public iii. universities.

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