

# EFFECTS OF ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT FOR CAREER DEVELOPMENT ON EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE: A CASE OF KENYAN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES

Manyasi J.N. <sup>\*1</sup>, Kibas P.B. <sup>2</sup>, & Chepkilot R. <sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Masinde Muliro University of Science & Technology

<sup>2</sup> & <sup>3</sup> Kabarak University

\*Corresponding author e-mail: [manyasijanet@yahoo.com](mailto:manyasijanet@yahoo.com)

## Abstract

Unprecedented changes have pushed organizations to undertake various initiatives to stay afloat. This has put pressure on organizations to maximally utilize the resources at their disposal for their benefit. As a result, the realization of the central role played by a firm's human resources in giving it a competitive advantage has brought to the fore the need for emphasizing human resource development in organizations, universities included. Debate has raged on the party responsible for career development programmes. Whereas individual employees have initiated and funded such processes, consensus has been building on the need for organizations to take a prominent role in initiating, managing and enhancing such processes. This study sought to examine the effect of university support for career development on lecturers' performance in public universities. Guided by the psychological contract theory, data was collected from 328 academic staff drawn from all the public universities in Kenya using questionnaires. It was analyzed using descriptive statistics and hypotheses tested using Pearson Product moment correlation coefficient. The results indicated that organizational support for career development of employees positively affected their performance in public universities. This support in terms of study leave, financial support for further studies as well as incentives such as salary increases and promotions on completion of such programmes enhanced organizational citizenship hence improved employee performance.

*Key words: career development, organizational support, psychological contract, employee performance*

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

The globalised business world has undergone unprecedented changes that have pushed organizations to undertake various initiatives to stay afloat (Baruch, 2004; Greenhaus, Callanan and Godshark, 2002). This has resulted in organizational mergers and acquisitions, incorporation of technology in operations with other firms downsizing their operations.

Given the central role played by a firm's human resources in giving it a competitive advantage, many organizations are turning to human resource development to increase their employees' knowledge, skills and capabilities so that they can survive. This push has elevated career development programmes to become an integral part of many organizations' strategic plans.

According to Thite(2001) and Kaye(2005), a well developed career development system enables organizations to tap into their wealth of in-house talent for staffing and promotion purposes. This ensures the knowledge, skills, experience and aspirations available are matched with the

needs of the organization. Organizations that invest in their employees expect to get positive reciprocity from employees in terms of organizational citizenship (Crepanzo and Mitchell, 2005). Investment in employees' career development is taking place both in the public and private sector with individual employees themselves or organizations they work for funding the exercise. This however is dependent on the needs of each individual or sector since individuals have different career aspirations and some sectors have been affected more than others by the changing global economic conditions.

In the higher education sector, the demand for a high calibre of employees to man the different sectors of the economy have put a premium of University education. World Bank (1994) and Sifuna (1998) note that education plays an important role in promoting the social and economic development of a country. In that light, Manyasi, Egessa and Warentho (2011) recognize the responsibility of Universities in equipping individuals with advanced knowledge, skills and competencies required for positions of responsibility in the public and private sector.

In Kenya, the number of people seeking university education has increased to the extent that public universities cannot absorb all the eligible candidates (Chacha, 2004; Kalai, 2009). The government has responded to this challenge by establishing more universities and university colleges, diversifying the programmes offered by these institutions (Vundi, 2009; Chacha 2004) as well as initiated self sponsored programmes. From an initial one university college in 1956, Kenya today boasts of seven full fledged public universities and thirteen university constituent colleges (CHE,2011). The number of private universities has also increased.

This rapid expansion of university education has led to a myriad of challenges especially for public universities. These include low funding from the exchequer forcing these institutions to operate under very tight budgets, increased student enrolment without commensurate improvement in available facilities as well as reduced research capacity (UNESCO, 1998; Chacha 2004; Kalai, 2009). Apart from these, recent studies by Kalai (2009) and Kadenyi *et al* (2009) indicate a decline in effective teaching, research and publishing by lecturers, yet these are the critical measures of lecturers' performance. This has been attributed to heavy workloads as a result of high students' enrolment.

### **1.1 Statement of the Problem**

Organizations can gain a competitive advantage from the resources they possess . They are therefore expected to strive to improve the capabilities of their employees so as to enable them cope with changes in their environment. Such practices enable an organization to get superior performance from their employees. Kenyan Public Universities have career development programmes as part of their mandate and strategic plans. Such initiatives are expected to improve lecturers' performance of duty.

The situation on the ground however paints a different picture with studies showing that the number of lecturers in these institutions undertaking career development programmes is on the decline (Chacha, 2004; Lewa, 2009). According to Lewa (2009), Kenyan Public universities have fewer PhD level staff when compared to many countries in sub Saharan Africa. Those registered for these programmes are behind schedule in the race towards their completion. Organizational support, family support, perceived benefits and one understands of his strengths

and weaknesses have been identified as predictors of the success of career development programmes and hence enhanced employee performance (Kraiger and Ford, 2007). Studies have been done on the effect of organizational support on an employee's career development programmes (Crawshaw, 2006, 2006; Kuo, 2006; Park, 2010). Such studies have however been done outside Kenya. This has presented university managers and policy makers with challenges of lack of empirical information on how to handle career management initiatives of staff. Kenyan public universities, with their unique challenges need an empirical study to guide them on how they should handle their organizational support for career development programmes of their academic staff.

This study sought to fill that empirical gap by finding out the effect of organizational support for career development on academic staff's performance in Kenyan Public Universities.

### **1.2 Study Objectives**

- (i) To identify the forms of career development support that is given to academic staff by public universities in Kenya.
- (ii) To examine the effect of the public universities' management support for career development on academic staff performance in public universities in Kenya.
- (iii) To examine the relationship between public universities' incentives for career development and academic staff performance in public universities in Kenya.

### **1.3 Study Hypotheses**

From the study objectives, two study hypotheses were formulated:

HO<sub>1</sub>: There is no relationship between universities financial support for career development programmes and academic staff performance in public universities in Kenya.

HO<sub>2</sub>: There is no relationship between universities' incentives for career development and lecturers' performance in Public Universities in Kenya.

### **1.4 Theoretical Framework**

This study was guided by the Psychological contract Theory. This theory holds that employees and employers have beliefs and expectations of each other in the employment relationship but which are not expressly articulated in the employment contract (Robinson 1996; Armstrong, 2006). According to Armstrong (2006), a psychological contract is a system of beliefs that employees believe are expected of them and the responses they expect in return from their employer.

In most cases, the psychological contract is defined by individual employees. They define this through the expectations they have of their employers, for example in terms of fair treatment, employment security, safe working environment and career development opportunities and growth. The employer on his part expects competence, effort, commitment and loyalty from the employee (Armstrong, 2006). Employees will reduce their performance when they feel the employer has violated the psychological contract, for example, when he downsizes, outsources labour, implements pay cuts or denies employees opportunities for career development. Employees will therefore execute their duties diligently and enhance their performance when they perceive they are being supported, treated fairly and appreciated by their employer.

This theory has however met criticisms from scholars. According to Cullinane and Dundon(2006),the psychological contract may not actually meet the threshold of a ‘contract’ since it is difficult to precisely pin down at what point the contract is negotiated,leaving the parties to merely have expectations of each other. Moreover, any party may change the expectations without expecting reprisals from the other party. Also, there is imbalance of power between the employer and the employee hence making the ‘contract’ to favour the stronger party who in most cases is the employer. As a result it is seen as being a bundle of expectations and not a contract.

### **1.5 Significance of the Study**

This study was important because its findings would enable Kenya public universities to determine the effect of their support in academic staffs’ career development on their performance. It would also benefit academic staff in these universities by informing them on the need to develop their careers so as to improve their performance and career well being. It would also serve as a reference point for human resources practitioners in different organizations by providing them with empirical evidence on the benefit of organizations supporting career development initiatives of their employees.

### **2.0 Literature Review**

Career development programmes are important in ensuring continuous updating and upgrading of employees’ knowledge, skills, attitudes and competence. According to Lee and Bruvold (2003), investing in the development of the careers of employees is central in the maintenance and development of skills, knowledge and abilities of both individual employees and the organization as a whole.

Debate has raged among scholars on the determination of the party responsible for career development. There are those who see it as being the responsibility of the employees (Puah and Anathram, 2006; Baruch; 2004; Cohen, 2003). There are others who see it as being the responsibility of the organization (Herr, 2001; Kulvisaechana, 2006).Baruch (2004) while supporting the individual effort perfective in career development also calls for organizational involvement in the career development of its employees. According to him, making it an individual’s responsibility reduces employee commitment to the organization. It also reduces their motivation and may result in employee turnover (Puah and Anathram, 2006). Employer support for Career development increases employee trust, job satisfaction, lowers turnover intentions and generally improves employer performance.

Public Universities can support lecturers career development initiatives through supportive leadership, creation of opportunities for organizational learning, funding career development programmes, offering incentives to those undertaking career development such as promotion upon completion, allowing such employees to be on study leave and organizing forums such as seminars, workshops and conferences for them to disseminate new knowledge and innovations (Crawshaw, 2006; Tan, 2008; Park, 2010; Kuo, 2006). Promotion, when based on increased competence, goes a long way in motivating employees to undertake career development programmes.

An employee output greatly determines an organizations performance. According to Dessler (2005), employee performance can be defined as the extent to which the employee is contributing to the strategic aims of the organization. It is expected that with enhancement of employees' capabilities through various career development programmes such as undertaking further studies, participating in research, seminars, workshops, conferences and team learning in organizations, employees performance will improve. For this to be ascertained, employee performance ought to be measured. Measures of employee performance differ with one's profession and workplace whereby measures of employee performance in the banking sector will differ from those used in the education sector (Kiriri and Gathuthi, 2009). In the university set up, university academic staff's performance can be measured through the extent to which they effectively teach allocated workloads, attendance of learned conferences, publication of books and journal articles and furtherance of academic and professional qualifications (Kiriri and Gathuthi, 2009).

Scholars such as Kamoche, Nyambegera and Mulinge (2004) argue that failure by organizations to systematically invest in training and development of its employees hurts industrial development and impedes improvement in labour productivity. There is therefore need for organizations to play a major role in supporting employees' career development programmes to ensure reciprocal good performance from employees.

### 3.0 Methodology

The study used a descriptive survey design. The unit of analysis was the Kenyan public universities where respondents were academic staff teaching in these universities. From a population of approximately 4000 lecturers, a study sample of 357 lecturers was selected using the sample determination table proposed by Krecie and Morgan (1970) as cited in Kasomo (2007). Simple random and purposive sampling techniques were used in selecting the sample to ensure all cadres of academic staff were represented in the study.

Questionnaires were used as the main data collection method. It had two parts, with the first part seeking information on the respondent's personal characteristics while the second part sought information on organizational support for career development and employee performance. The data collection tool were dropped at the respective universities and later picked by the researchers and their research assistants. Out of the expected 357 questionnaires, 328 were returned representing an over 90% return rate. The data was then coded and analyzed using the SPSS computer programme.

### 4.0 Analysis of results

The data collected was analyzed and reported with the analysis covering the demographics of the respondents, frequencies of the respondents and tests of hypotheses.

#### 4.1 Demographic characteristics of the sample

The study got fairly the same number of respondents from all the public universities ranging from 44 – 50 respondents as shown on Table 4.1 of these respondents, most of them were male, 216 (65.9%) and a majority were aged between 30 and 40 years, 162 (49.4%) .

**Table 4.1: Demographic characteristics of respondents**

CHARACTERISTICS	frequency	percentage(%)
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<b>University of respondent</b>		
Jomo kenyatta	44	13.4
Egerton	50	15.2
Masinde Muliro	50	15.2
Kenyatta	49	14.9
Nairobi	40	12.2
Moi	49	14.9
<u>Maseno</u>	<u>46</u>	<u>14.1</u>
<b>Total</b>	<b>328</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	216	65.9
Female	<u>112</u>	<u>34.1</u>
<b>Total</b>	<b>328</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Age</b>		
Below 30 years	76	23.2
30-40 years	162	49.2
41-50 years	61	18.6
Above 50 years	<u>29</u>	<u>8.8</u>
<b>Total</b>	<b>328</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Highest academic qualification</b>		
Bachelor's degree	64	19.5
Masters degree	170	51.8
Doctor of philosophy(PhD)	<u>94</u>	<u>28.7</u>
<b>Total</b>	<b>328</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Current Position</b>		
Graduate Assistant	42	12.8
Tutorial fellow/Assistant Lecturer	117	35.7
Lecturer	107	32.6
Senior Lecturer	39	11.9
Associate Professor	16	4.9
Professor	<u>7</u>	<u>2.1</u>
<b>Total</b>	<b>328</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Teaching experience at university</b>		
Below 5 years	158	48.2
5-10 years	95	29.0
10-15 years	47	14.3
Above 15 years	<u>28</u>	<u>8.5</u>
<b>Total</b>	<b>328</b>	<b>100</b>

*Source: Research study, 2011*

On these respondents, a majority of them had a Masters degree, 170 (51.8%) as their highest academic qualification with most of them, 266(81.1%), holding the lecturer position and below.

#### **4.2 Descriptive Statistics**

The study also elicited descriptive data that was summarized in frequencies. The respondents gave varied responses to questions seeking to find out their views on the level of universities

support on career development programmes and the extent to which it affected academic staff's performance. This is summarized in Table 4.2.

**Table 4.2: Descriptive staff responses on university support for career programmes**

	QUESTION	RESPONSE									
		Strongly agree		Agree		Undecided		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
		f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
1.	My university offers study leave to academic staff pursuing further studies.	144	43	134	40.9	26	7.9	23	7.0	1	0.3
2.	My university pays fees for academic staff pursuing further studies.	59	18	107	32.6	71	21.6	63	19.2	28	8.5
3.	My university pays participation fees and upkeep for academic staff attending conferences seminars, workshops and other career development programmes.	79	24.1	114	34.8	66	20.1	54	16.5	15	4.6
4.	The university management encourages academic staff to undertake career development programmes.	98	29.9	162	49.4	42	12.8	24	7.3	2	0.6
5.	My university has a fair way of nominating academic staff to undertake career development programmes.	68	20.7	139	42.4	74	22.6	46	14	1	0.3
6.	Academic staff of my university who successfully undertake career development programmes are given additional responsibilities.	74	22.6	187	57	35	10.7	22	6.7	10	3.0
7.	My university gives salary increments to academic staff upon successful completion of the career development program.	133	40.5	106	32.3	34	10.4	39	11.9	16	4.9
8.	Academic staff in my university who successfully complete further studies.	90	27.4	145	44.2	44	13.2	44	13.2	5	1.5
9.	My university prioritizes internal appointments and promotions for the staff who have successfully completed further studies.	99	30.2	162	49.4	45	13.7	22	6.7	0	0
10.	The support given by my university on career development to staff has had a positive influence on the academic staffs performance.	94	28.7	151	46	57	17.4	21	6.4	5	1.5

Source: Research study, 2011

### 4.3 Tests of Hypotheses

Two hypotheses were developed for the study. They were tested using Pearson's product moment correlation test at 95% confidence level. The results are presented in Table 4.3 and 4.4 respectively.

#### 4.3.1 Hypothesis One:

HO<sub>1</sub>: There is no relationship between universities financial support for career development and academic staff's performance in public universities in Kenya.

**Table 4.3: Correlation between universities' support and lecturers' performance**

	Lecturers' Performance
<b>Universities' support</b> Pearson correlation(r)	.714**
Sig.(2-tailed)	.000
N	328

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2 tailed)

Source: Research study, 2011

Its show that there is a positive relationship between universities support for career development and academic staff's performance in public universities( $r=0.714$ ,  $p=0.000$ ). Financial support here was seen from the perspectives of the universities paying fees for tuition for those pursuing further studies and participation fees and upkeep for those attending seminars, workshops and conferences. The null hypothesis is therefore rejected and the alternative hypothesis confirmed.

#### 4.3.2. Hypothesis 2

HO<sub>2</sub>: There is no relationship between public universities incentives for career development and academic staff's performance in public universities in Kenya.

**Table 4.3: Correlation between universities' incentives and lecturers' performance**

	Lecturers' Performance
<b>Universities' incentives</b> Pearson correlation(r)	.430**
Sig.(2-tailed)	.000
N	328

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2 tailed)

Source: Research study, 2011

The results show that there is a strong positive relationship between public universities incentives for career development and academic staff performance in public universities ( $r=0.430$ ,  $p=0.000$ ). Incentives for career development are seen in terms of salary increments and promotions for those successfully completing career development programmes such as furthering one's studies. The null hypothesis is therefore rejected and the alternative hypothesis confirmed that there is a strong positive relationship between public universities incentives for career development and academic staff performance.

## 5.0 Discussions



The results of the study show that a majority of the academic staff are male 216(65.5%), painting a picture similar to other sectors of the economy in Kenya where a majority of employees are male (Sikueya, 2007). This calls for affirmative action to bridge the gender gap. Most of the respondents were aged below 40 years (72.6%) and had a Masters degree, (71.3%) as their highest academic qualification. This points to the need for career development programmes to be enhanced since university academic staff are expected to be holders of a PhD degree (Lewa, 2009). Most respondents had also worked for at least 10 years in their universities, indicating a relative stability of employment tenure. Under such circumstances, meaningful career development programmes can be initiated and sustained so as to manage talent within the universities. Of all the respondents, only 63 (18.9%) were above the rank of senior lecturer. This indicated that since many of the academic staff did not possess a PhD degree, they could not go beyond the lecturer position since ascending the ladder beyond this level requires the employee to possess a PhD degree as well as being involved in publishing and research. The demographic data therefore painted a picture of the need for academic staff to pursue career advancement programmes to enable them ascend career ladder.

The study identified various forms of career development programmes undertaken by academic staff. This included pursuit of further academic studies such as attainment of Masters or Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) degrees, writing of scholarly articles for publication in books and journals, conducting empirical research in various fields of study, participation in seminars, workshops and conferences where research findings were disseminated and new knowledge shared by the participants. Others undertook higher professional studies.

The study also established that the public universities supported career development initiatives of its academic staff through giving financial assistance to those pursuing further studies, payment of participation fees and subsistence expenses for those taking part in workshops, seminars and conferences, granting of time off duty and study leave for those undertaking such initiatives as well as providing incentives such as salary increments and promotions to those who successfully complete these initiatives. These were confirmed by a majority of the respondents 264 (79.6%) who strongly agreed and agreed respectively with the statement that academic staff who successfully undertake career development programmes are given additional responsibilities. The level of the universities contribution towards meeting financial costs of career development was however average given the 166(50.6%) respondents who strongly agreed and agreed with the statement that the university paid fees for academic staff pursuing further studies. The same was noted in the response towards the question on whether the universities paid participation fees and subsistence allowances for those attending conferences workshops or seminars where 79 (24.1%) and 114 (34.8%) of the respondents strongly agreed and agreed respectively with the statements.

The study found that the public universities management encouraged academic staff to undertake career development programmes as was confirmed by 98(29.9%) and 162(49.4%) of the respondents who strongly agreed and agreed respectively with the statement. This greatly affected university academic staff performance since it made the staff to embrace career development initiatives. As a result, a majority of the respondents were in agreement that the support given by the universities to academic staff's career development programmes greatly

affected their performance as was confirmed by 94(28.7%) and 151(46%) of the respondents who strongly agreed and agreed respectively with the statement.

The inferential analysis of data using Pearson's product moment correlation also confirmed the study hypotheses. It showed that there existed a strong positive relationship between universities incentives for career development and academic staff's performance in public universities. It also confirmed the first alternative hypothesis that held that the organizational support(financial assistance/support) given by public universities towards career development programme for academic staff had a positive relationship with academic staff performance. These results tally with those of Hung & Wong (2007) and Mudor and Tooksoon (2011) who also confirmed the importance of organization support for career advancement in enhancing employee performance and retention.

## **6.0 Conclusion**

The study therefore concludes that organizational support for career development is an important ingredient in enhancing employee performance. This is because it improves an employee's morale hence increasing their output. It will also make employees to feel that the employers have fulfilled their part of the psychological contract.

## **7.0 Recommendation**

Based on the findings, the study, recommends that affirmative action be undertaken in public universities in Kenya in a bid to ensure that more women are engaged as academic staff and offered opportunities for career advancement. This will enhance gender balance and workforce diversity.

Public universities in particular and organizations in general also ought to come up with policies to guide the modes and the degree of organizational support for career development. This is because organizational support for career development programmes greatly influences employee performance. They should also come up with various incentives that encourage employees to undertake career development activities. These incentives can be both financial and non financial in nature.

The organizations should also be generally involved in career planning and development of their employees' careers instead of leaving it to be an employee's initiative. This will ensure that the psychological contract from the employees' perspective is fulfilled hence eliciting loyalty, organizational citizenship and superior performance from them.

## **8.0 Limitations and suggestions for further research**

The sample size of this study was limited hence could contribute to the non generalization of the findings. The study was also carried out in public universities in Kenya, leaving out the constituent colleges of these universities. Further research should therefore be conducted using a larger sample and covering both public universities and constituent colleges.

The study did not also include intervening or moderating variables yet these variables could have played a role in influencing the results of the study. Future research should take into consideration the effects of these variables.



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