

ABSTRACT

Traditional sources of competitive advantage are changing and it is imperative to deploy new strategies to successfully compete under changing external conditions. Effective employee relation strategies encourage individual and group commitments to excellence and help in creating favorable environment at workplace. Public universities in Western Kenya, as organizations, are faced with challenges that seem to be detrimental to their performance. These include employee turnover, brain drain and retention of staff among others. All these have resulted in poor relations between the university and its employees. The nature of the relationship of employees at work is therefore fundamental to the effective management of an organization. Past studies have attributed contributions of the employee relation strategies to the organizational performance. Previous studies have not focused on what these relations strategies contribute to the employee performance. It is for this reason that this study sought to establish the influence of employee relations strategies on employee performance in public universities in Western Kenya. Specifically, the study: examined the influence of staffing and promotions; determined influence of employee training and development, and ascertained the influence performance appraisal on employee performance in Public University in Western Kenya. The study was guided by Human Relations Theory: the Hawthorne Effect. Correlation research design was adopted. The population was all the 102 Human Resource departments' employees of six public Universities in Western Kenya. It was a census study. Data sources were both primary and secondary. Primary data were collected using structured questionnaires. Validity of the instruments was ascertained through expert opinion and revision. Reliability of between 0.765 and 0.876 was ascertained using Cronbach's alpha test that was conducted on pilot data from 10 respondents. Data were analysed using regression analysis to determine influence of employee relations strategies on employee performance. The findings revealed 64.7% variation in employee performance accounted for by the combined influence of human relation strategies ($R^2 = 0.647$). The study further revealed that staffing and promotion ($\beta = .302$, $p = .000$), training and development ($\beta = .202$, $p = .000$) and performance appraisal ($\beta = .411$, $p = .000$) all had significant positive influence on employee performance in public Universities in Western Kenya. Therefore, the study concluded that staffing and promotion, training and development and performance appraisal are all important antecedents of employee performance. The study further recommends the need for Universities management in Kenya to intensify the implementation of employee relation strategies such as: staffing and promotions, training and development and performance appraisal as they are positively associated with employee performance. The findings of this study could help the Universities to plan for employee relations strategies that are effective, relevant and acceptable to the stakeholders of the Universities. Additionally, the study provided new knowledge on the areas of employee relations strategies and their likely influence on employee performance.