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Original Article

Role of Employee Commitment in Total Quality Management on Performance of Institutions of Higher Learning in Kenya

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Employee commitment is one of the common thematic areas for TQM in the service sector. It is crucial in fostering a sense of purpose, dedication, and alignment with the organization's mission and values. Since organization performance is linked to product quality and depends on its employees' dedication, organizations seeking competitive advantages through TQM must critically examine the levels of employee commitment. The universities in sub-Saharan Africa face elevated environmental dynamism in providing quality education. Due to conceptual gaps in the studies on employee commitment to university education in Kenya, the study evaluated the influence of employee commitment on the performance goals of private universities in Kenya. The study targeted seventeen (17) privately chartered universities founded by religious-based institutions in Kenya and utilized descriptive research design. The study censused 17 heads of administrative sections, functional departments and academic sections and used questionnaires as the primary data collection tool. Cronbach's Alpha reliability testing indicated that the instrument achieved scale reliability. The study used both descriptive and inferential analysis, and the results indicated that performance goals positively correlated with employee commitment ($r = 0.670$, $p < 0.05$) and explained 45.82 % variance in performance goals with an effect size; $\beta_1 = 0.67697$ ($t = 12.97$, $p < 0.05$). The findings showed that employee commitment significantly influences the performance goals of these universities. The study recommends that these universities should seek to train, develop and align their human capital towards higher quality objectives from individual, departmental and organizational levels. This study is significant to the stakeholders in privately – chartered universities in Kenya and related contexts, as it will offer more enriching information on employee commitment to quality.

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INTRODUCTION

Organizational performance is the product of different organizational components and can be based on the context (Hussein et al., 2016). Thus, the performance indicators for academic institutions ensure the maintenance of university operating standards, encourage individual universities to work on inadequacies and promote university competitiveness (Chen et al., 2019). Due to the importance of the universities in an economy, quality management with a strategic focus provides a clearer understanding of the importance of quality management (Akbar et al., 2016). Consequently, the quality of products and services in higher education settings is linked to organizational success (Mohammadi et al., 2017).

Universities face various challenges that include internationalization, decentralization, and the provision of quality education (Mohammadi et al., 2017) that arise from technological development, rapid economic transformation, and environmental dynamism (Al-Salim, 2018). Globalization and environmental dynamism in the higher education sector have necessitated adopting and implementing quality management systems in education institutions (Paliulis & Labanauskis, 2015). The higher education sector has embraced the principles of total quality management (TQM) in an attempt to remain competitive and survive in the long run (Sanhey, 2016). TQM is an organization-wide philosophy that requires all employees to meet/exceed customer's requirements and is implemented to improve organizational effectiveness (Addis, 2019).

Customer attention and frequent improvement are the two most popular quality assurance mechanisms in university education that directly connect to teaching and learning. However, when it came to implementing TQM in their

universities, some believed that participatory management programs were in charge of educational quality. As a result, universities must learn from best practices, focus on their core processes, particularly teaching and learning procedures, and conduct a systematic performance evaluation, which will be carried out through TQM (Terziovski, 2016).

TQM is an instrument for the management of processes of higher education (Paliulis & Labanauskis, 2015) and has varying perspectives and orientations related to conceptualization, measurement, and control (Sahney, 2016). Total Quality Management in education is multi-faceted – it believes in the foundation of an educational institution on a systems approach, which includes within its ambit the quality of inputs in the form of students, faculty, support staff and infrastructure; the quality of processes in the form of the learning and teaching activity; and the quality of outputs in the form of the enlightened students that move out of the system (Sahney, 2016).

Every organization's success is heavily reliant on dedication and committed employees. Employee commitment refers to the employee's devotion to their institution (Ogini, 2020). While quality can be a significant source of competitive edge (Abimbola et al., 2020), achieving this goal heavily depends on the company's HR. Employees are primarily responsible for implementing TQM practices that ensure an organization's competitive advantage. As a result, adopting TQM practices with the assistance of employee engagement in their implementation appears to be an effective method for an institution to achieve its objective of outperforming its competitors.

Organizational success is contingent on employee commitment and in that employees are largely

responsible for the successful implementation of TQM which confers the competitive advantages to the organization. Employee commitment predict the task performance which in turn determines the success of an organization (WeiBo et al., 2010). High employee commitment as reflected by the extent to which employees identify with the organization and the commitment to its goals (Dixit & Bhati, 2012). The higher learning institutions are therefore challenged to increase commitment levels among its employees in order to remain competitive (Sangeeta, 2016).

Though, the university education sector in Kenya is largely fragmented with more than 53 chartered universities of which 32 are publicly - chartered while 21 are privately - chartered. Seventeen (17) of the 21 privately - chartered universities were established by religious-based organisations (KNBS, 2022). These universities include Adventist University of Africa, African International University, African Nazarene University, The Catholic University of Eastern Africa, Daystar University, International Leadership University, KAG East University, Kenya Highlands Evangelical University, Kenya Methodist University, Pan African Christian University, Presbyterian University of East Africa, Scott Christian University, Strathmore University, St. Paul's University, Umma University, University of Eastern Africa- Baraton, Uzima University.

Problem Statement

In response to growing concerns from stakeholders about poor or inconsistent quality, higher education institutions have to increasingly seek ways to improve the quality of education offered. Thus, higher education institutions' long-run competitiveness depends on adopting and implementing quality management approaches (Sahney, 2016). The need for TQM in higher education institutions is driven by the impact of higher education on social transformation, societal development, poverty alleviation and social justice (Fomunyam, 2018). Quality achievement is a significant source of competitive

edge, heavily dependent on organizational human capital, and employees are primarily in charge of implementing TQM practices (Abimbola et al., 2020). Employee commitment is crucial for fostering a sense of purpose, dedication, and alignment with the mission and values, which leads to enhanced morale, productivity, and staff retention (Ogini, 2020). Due to conceptual gaps in the studies on employee commitment in universities in Kenya, the study evaluated the influence of employee commitment on the performance goals of private universities in Kenya.

THEORETICAL REVIEW

The resource-based theory was first advanced by Penrose (1959), who postulated that resources are critical components of the firm. The theory was later advanced by Wernerfelt (1984), who emphasized that products require the services of several resources, and in turn, most resources can be used in several products. Resources are conveniently classified into three categories: physical capital, human capital, and organizational capital (Barney, 1991), with other important determinants being the firm's activities, routines, or business processes (Porter, 1991). As per resource – based view (RBV) assets are input and output into a company's production process and are categorized as capital equipment, HR, and capital (Currie, 2009).

The RBV provides the needed foundation for organizations to consider developing and expanding organizational practices, which can strengthen and maintain their current business standing and establish a competitive position through strategic resource configuration to gain long-term competitive advantages (Eisenhardt & Bingham, 2017). Furthermore, the RBV promotes optimizing strategic resources and measures to capture market opportunities for improved performance. The RBV also postulates the essential contributions of internal resources for organizations to gain the required competitive advantage (The et al., 2023).

Administrative decisions largely determine the utilization of productive resources; therefore, it is not only the resources that are the inputs to the production process but also the resourcefulness of the resources (capabilities) that determines a firm's success (Ambrosini & Bowman, 2009). The extent to which the firm's strategies are implemented may be determined by how these resources are integrated (Combs et al., 2011). A firm's resources shape its capabilities to use its resources efficiently, and in turn, the management's experience influences how the firm develops its capabilities (Kor et al., 2007).

A capability is the ability of a group of resources to undertake a challenging task of action. Each organization comprises distinct resources and capabilities that serve as the foundation for its strategic plan and the key cause of its returns. In the hyper-competitive environment, the differences in firms over time are primarily driven by their unique capabilities and resources (Currie, 2009). In today's globalized and competitive business environment a committed workforce is a key ingredient that determines organizational success (Dixit & Bhati, 2012).

The management of quality confers competitiveness to an organization and since TQM is considered as holistic approach to quality, it also portends to align employee to the quality objectives of the organization through cultural change (Hansson, Backlund & Lycke, 2003). Employee commitment is a key determinant to performance and therefore committed employees form a key source of HR capabilities which are likely to influence attainment of competitive advantages as well as performance objectives (Abimbola, Oyatoye & Oyenuga, 2020). Thus, successful TQM implementation efforts require increased employee commitment levels (Krajcsák, 2019).

LITERATURE REVIEW

The empirical studies on employee commitment vary and contextualize different sectors and countries. For instance, Daniels (2016); Tutei et al. (2017) focused on the employee commitment

aspects in institutions of higher learning institutions, Sanjo and Eze (2019); Ndai and Makhamara (2020); Ikyanyon and Agber (2020) examined the influence of employee commitment on organizational performance of private – sector organizations and reported dissimilar findings.

In their study, Daniels (2016) found that employee commitment significantly influences organizational performance in higher education institutions, emphasizing its importance in the context of faith-based universities. Sanjo and Eze (2019) investigated employees' commitment and business performance in a Nigerian manufacturing organization by surveying employees of one organization. The findings indicated that employee commitment, as measured by affective commitment, impacts performance. However, when paired with other aspects of staff devotion, employee loyalty has no meaningful effect on performance. As a result, the findings imply that employee dedication is crucial to an organization's success.

By administering a survey, Ndai and Makhamara (2020) examined the influence of employee commitment on organizational performance in Timafloor Company Limited in Laikipia County, Kenya. The findings indicate that ongoing employee participation had an impact on organizational effectiveness. Tutei et al. (2017) evaluated the concept of continuous dedication and employee performance at the University of Eastern Africa, Baraton Kenya. The study observed a negative association between continued commitments and employee performance.

Ikyanyon and Agber (2020) investigated the impact of employees' commitment to performance using a cement manufacturing firm in Nigeria. The findings indicated that affective and continuous commitment had a considerable beneficial influence on performance, while normative commitment did not. The studies examining employee commitment are varied and dissimilar with contextual differences in findings between higher learning institutions and private–sector organizations. The current study focuses on

examining the influence of employee commitment on the performance goals of universities in the Kenyan context. Thus;

H₀: Employee commitment does not significantly influence the performance of faith-based universities in Kenya.

METHODOLOGY

The study employed a descripto–explanatory design detailing the specifics of employee commitment employed by the privately chartered universities in Kenya. The design was considered appropriate since it described the details of the institutional practices and provided an impact analysis. The study targeted 17 privately chartered

universities founded by religious institutions and targeted head or their deputies from deputy vice chancellor and/or registrars, ten functional departments (Customer Service, Finance and accounting, Human Resources, Information, communication and technology, Library Services, Marketing, Supplies and Procurement, Quality Assurance, and Student Welfare Unit) and four common schools (Applied Sciences, Business, Theology and Social Science) with a population of 289 individuals. Due to the manageability of the study population, the study employed a census technique to select a sample size of 289 individuals. The study utilized a questionnaire as the main data collection tool.

Table 1: Reliability analysis for the study

Variable	Number of items	Cronbach's Alpha
Organization performance	12	0.885
Employee commitment	12	0.876

Data Analysis

Data was prepared in several steps, including serialization, verification, and checks before data was coded and entered into the Statistical Package for Social Science version 20.

Data was verified, prepared, and coded into numerical formats before entering into the Statistical Package for Social Science version 20. Data was analyzed descriptively using means and standard deviation (SD) and inferentially using linear regression. Preceding the regression

analysis was examining the assumptions of the linear regression model.

RESULTS

Descriptive Statistics

To ensure the instrument's validity, the study adopted and modified the measures from Jackson (2004), which included employee commitment in three facets; affective, behavioural, and cognitive. The study then measured the instrument using a five–point Likert Scale that ranged from 1 - Strongly Disagree (SD) to 5 - Strong Agree (SA).

Table 2: Descriptive analysis for the indicators of employee commitment

Items	Mean	SD
I am pleased that my work has contributed to the quality of my products	3.428	1.138
I am satisfied with my job that comes with the production of quality work	3.373	1.173
It is important that the organization continually emphasizes quality	3.791	1.028
I am continually taking action to improve the quality of my work	4.124	0.932
I would continue to treat quality as an important aspect of my job	3.443	1.174
I don't mind spending more time on a task to increase its quality,	3.552	1.216
I am prepared to put in extra effort to meet quality goals	4.095	0.875
In my job, quality is the most important target to achieve	3.965	0.897
I feel that quality is the most important aspect of my job	4.080	0.839
I take personal responsibility for the quality of my work	3.970	1.005
Each individual plays a part in improving the quality of products offered	3.697	1.036
I feel I share a responsibility for the quality of the products offered	3.896	1.041

The indications from the descriptive statistics in *Table 2* show that employees have higher behavioural aspects of employee commitment in terms of focus on quality goals and objectives, followed by cognitive aspects that comprise personal responsibility for quality and quality improvements. However, they are less concerned

with the affective aspects of commitment, which relate to individual contribution and the organization's emphasis on quality. This implies that these organizations have emphasized the behavioural aspects of employee commitment more than the cognitive and affective aspects

Table 3: Descriptive analysis of the Organizational performance indicators

Indicators	Mean	SD
The number of privately – sponsored students currently enrolled has increased in the last three years	3.6716	1.2456
The number of government-sponsored students currently enrolled has increased in the last three years	3.8458	1.2574
The number of international students currently enrolled has increased in the last three years	3.5274	1.1792
Over the years, our university has increased the number of academic programmes	3.8159	1.2652
More departments have been created owing to the increase in the number of academic programmes offered	3.6567	1.1029
The number of academic programmes has prompted the creation of more schools in the university	3.5174	1.2251
The number of academic staff has increased in the last three years	3.6567	1.1120
The number of academic staff matches the work demands of the university	3.5174	1.0775
The number of academic staff qualified with master's and doctoral degrees has increased in the last three years	4.0249	0.9666
The number of students graduating with degrees and diplomas has increased in the last three years	3.8905	1.1524
The number of students graduating with master's and doctoral degrees has increased in the last three years	3.4179	1.2102
The general completion rate of students has increased in the last three years	3.7164	1.0070
The university has increased the number of research publications by the academic staff over the last three years	3.5572	1.0237
The number of research grants and programmes in the university has increased over the last three years	3.3184	1.1739
The university has increased the number of research publications by students over the last three years	3.2886	1.3290

The indications in descriptive statistics in *Table 3* show that these universities have seen increases in the number of students over the three years, and this has resulted in an increase in the academic programmes being offered and growth in the number of departments and schools. The university also seeks to grow its product offering while improving and developing academic staffing requirements, but it falls short in the

number of research, research grants, and publications. These institutions tend to rely more on publicly-sponsored students' enrolment than privately-sponsored students, thus impeding their growth.

Linear regression was carried out to determine the influence of employee commitment on performance, as shown in *Table 4* below.

Table 4: Regression Analysis Results

Variable	R	R ²	F	Stn β	t
Employee commitment	0.670	0.4582	83.97*	0.67697	12.97*

*Significance at 0.05

The results in *Table 4* indicate that the regression model is statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) in explaining the variations in the performance goals of institutions of higher learning. The model indicated that employee commitment explains about 45.82 % variance in performance goals with an effect size of 0.670. The results show that employee commitment statistically significantly influences the performance goals of private universities in Kenya. Based on this result, the study rejected the null hypothesis that employee commitment has no significant influence on the performance goals of private universities in Kenya. It concluded that employee commitment significantly influences the performance goals of private universities in Kenya.

DISCUSSION

The study's findings indicate a statistically significant and positive influence of employee commitment on the performance goals of private universities in Kenya. Extant studies have reported a significant positive effect of employee commitment on performance (Wani & Mehraj, 2014). The impact of employee commitment occurs through employee involvement in quality management aspects, teamwork, and communication. Employee commitment is core to TQM implementation (Addis et al., 2019). Employees' involvement in quality decisions, quality teams, and quality awareness are critical to successfully implementing TQM (Irfan & Kee, 2013). Employee commitment inculcates appreciation to promote a holistic quality approach so that it will become everyone's responsibility. The involvement of employees boosts morale and a sense of authority and responsibility among employees (Wani & Mehraj, 2014).

Employee involvement and teamwork foster employee motivation and success through learning opportunities and practising new skills (Pambreni et al., 2019). Employee involvement improves quality and increases productivity (Attakora-Amaniampong et al., 2014). Employee involvement builds trust and confidence and increases information flow between different

organizational levels, which helps the organization resolve quality-related issues (Irfan & Kee, 2013). Teamwork fosters an atmosphere of mutual relationship, involvement, and participation and teamwork as a TQM practice is positively associated with employees' job satisfaction (Talib et al., 2013). Effective communication draws employee support towards achieving organizational goals, influences the organization towards systematic employee involvement and customer satisfaction and improves organizational performance (Talib et al., 2013).

Effective management results in greater commitment of employees in that the organizational behavioural aspects tend to drive the achievement of TQM (Addis et al., 2019). Adopting TQM practices in service organizations is linked to learning orientation and market performance (Lam et al., 2011). TQM focuses on meeting customer requirements and satisfaction through the involvement of employees at all levels of the production process (Addis et al., 2019). Implementing TQM positively correlates with quality performance (Talib et al., 2013). Effective communication system is essential in championing quality improvement processes (Homaid et al., 2015).

Theoretically, employees are considered inimitable organizational assets. As a management philosophy, TQM harnesses HR in the most effective way to achieve organizational objectives (Addis et al., 2019). A resource-based view indicates that the human resources system contributes to the preservation of the competitive advantage by utilizing the development of specific organizational competencies, generating complex social relationships embedded in the history and culture of the organization (Ruiz-Carrillo & Fernández-Ortiz, 2005). Effective implementation of TQM is a valuable asset in each organization. TQM practices can produce critical competitive capabilities and become an essential source of competitive advantage. Implementing TQM practices as a competitive weapon can gradually improve competitive

advantage and organizational performance (Munizu, 2013).

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that employee commitment significantly influences the performance goals of private universities in Kenya. The positive effect is drawn more from behavioural than cognitive or affective. These aspects tend to motivate employees to achieve the organization's quality objectives and, in turn, influence performance.

Recommendation

The study recommends that these institutions of higher learning should seek to train, develop, and align their human capital towards higher quality objectives at the individual, departmental, and organizational levels. This initiative includes emphasizing all aspects of employee commitment to quality from cognitive, which would drive the affective and behavioural aspects. Through such initiatives, universities would derive a competitive advantage from their emphasis on employee commitment and improve the implementation of total quality management initiatives.

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