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Kyondo Khadija Nancy, Dr. Lucinda Mugaa & Dr. James Gitari

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Employee Relations and Staff Performance in Public Universities within Nairobi County, Kenya

*¹Kyondo Khadija Nancy, ²Dr. Lucinda Mugaa & ³Dr. James Gitari

¹Student, Department of Entrepreneurship and Economics, Co-operative University of Kenya

²Lecturer, Department of Entrepreneurship and Economics, Co-operative University of Kenya

³Lecturer, Department of Entrepreneurship and Economics, Co-operative University of Kenya

*Email of corresponding author: hadijanancy@yahoo.com

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Abstract

The study examined the link between staff performance and employee relations practices in public universities in Nairobi County, Kenya. The specific objectives were to examine how employee welfare, communication, and participation affect staff performance. Descriptive research methodology was used, guided by the Human Theory and Scientific Management Theory. The target respondents were university staff members, including teaching and non-teaching staff. To accomplish the study's goals, descriptive statistics were used to analyse the primary data obtained (structured questionnaires). SPSS version 26 was used to analyse the quantitative data produced using descriptive statistics. The study found that there was a significant positive correlation between all the study variables: employee performance and employee welfare ($r=0.783$, $p < 0.05$); employee performance and employee communication ($r=0.803$, $p < 0.05$); and employee performance and employee participation ($r=0.759$, $p < 0.05$). The regression results indicate that all three objectives (employee welfare, employee communication, and employee participation) positively affect employee performance in public universities in Nairobi, Kenya. The study found that there is a strong positive correlation between employee relations practices and staff performance in public universities in Nairobi County, Kenya. This means that when employee relations practices are well managed, staff performance is likely to be high. The study recommends that public universities in Nairobi County, Kenya should focus on improving their employee relations practices in order to enhance staff performance.

Keywords: *Employee Relations, Staff Performance, Public Universities, Nairobi County, Kenya*

1.0 Background to the Study

Employee relations encompass the range of interactions and relationships between employers and employees, influenced by administrative decisions and actions (Boxall and Purcell, 2015). Effective employee relations programs aim to create a positive work environment, minimize conflicts, and boost company performance, often through policies that promote employee well-being, communication, and participation (Al-Ajlouni, 2021). The need for structured employee relations grew out of the industrial revolution, which marked the birth of large industries and labor issues (Roberts & David, 2020). Academically speaking, universities serve as centers for higher education and research. In Kenya, the history of higher education dates back to 1956, and legislative acts have led to the establishment of 31 public universities (Kibuku, Ochieng & Wausi, 2020; Bates, 2019). Both fields have different historical contexts but are crucial for understanding both organizational and educational systems. Universities in Kenya are facing multiple challenges such as increased student enrollment, limited resources, and faculty burnout, which impact their overall performance (Ibua, 2017; Kalai, 2009). To address the high demand for higher education, the Kenyan government has expanded universities and introduced self-sponsored programs, although this rapid expansion has led to issues like constrained budgets and reduced research output (Vundi, 2009; UNESCO, 1998). Meanwhile, labor laws globally govern employee relations, with specific rules in Canada and differing interpretations in the U.S. (Malin et al., 2013). Studies in other countries have shown that open communication is key to a productive workplace (Sequeira, 2018), but many Malaysian companies limit employee participation (Parasuraman, Kelly and Rathakrishnan, 2013). Both educational and labor sectors face challenges in adapting to changing conditions and demands.

Temporary and part-time employment offer flexibility but can also lead to precarious job conditions with low pay and few opportunities for advancement (Dunne, 2013; Kalleberg, Reskin & Hudson, 2000). Employee relations models vary by country, such as the Wagner Act model in Canada (Carter et al., 2017), the Industrial Relations Reform Act of 1993 in Australia (Ramia, 2020), and the Taft-Hartley and Landrum-Griffin Acts in the United States (Hodges, 2021). Research shows that effective Employee Relationship Management (ERM) can boost productivity and loyalty in workers (Rahman and Khatun, 2017). Like other parts of the world, Africa has its own labor regulations, such as those outlined in Section 17(3) of the 1999 Nigerian Constitution, which covers various labor issues including remuneration and age restrictions (Dugeri, 2020). East African nations like Uganda and Tanzania have constitutions and labor laws that set forth principles of employee relations, including rights to collective bargaining and freedom of association (Employment and Labour Relations Act of 2004; 1995 Constitution). Research studies, such as those by Amekudzi (2021) in Ghana's banking sector and Karanja (2018), highlight the positive impact of employee involvement and good working conditions on job satisfaction and overall business performance. In Kenya, labor rights have sometimes been compromised due to economic and political shifts, despite being enshrined in the constitution (Mulunda, 2019). Otieno, Waiganjo, and Njeru (2015) shows the importance of employee communication and a positive work environment for organizational success. Therefore, while laws governing employee relations exist globally, it's crucial for organizations to understand that their staff are their most valuable resource for maintaining productivity and growth.

Effective employee relations are vital for enhancing commitment, job satisfaction, and performance among employees, as noted by various researchers like Bosire, Muya and Matula (2021) and Waithaka (2019). These relations are often shaped by labor laws and organizational practices. Studies in Kenya's banking sector by Kiruja and Kimencu (2020) emphasize the role of manager-employee communication in determining the success of employee relations

initiatives. Cherono (2017) and Odhong and Omolo (2014) further highlight that worker involvement and favorable working conditions significantly boost productivity. While these studies span different industries, they collectively point to the crucial relationship between effective employee relations and organizational success, laying the groundwork for further research in Nairobi County's universities (Mwangi & Kihara, 2021).

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Effective employee relations are essential to the success or failure of any organization. As Otoo (2019) states, employee relations include both collective and individual regulation of the employer-employee relationship as well as the identification of both material and procedural difficulties at the workplace, organizational, and industrial areas. Employers and university administration have neglected the topic of employee-employee relations and performance. Research by Blyton (2008) found that when workers are not satisfied with management, the authorities, or even their own co-workers, they perform poorly. With the upcoming of several universities in Kenya, each institution is faced with challenges of how to remain competitive. One way to remain competitive is through good performance, and this can be improved or achieved by reforming employee relations. However, despite the government of Kenya putting a lot of effort to fund universities education through capitation and Helb, communication, participation, and involvement in the running of these institutions have not been given the attention they need. As a result of this, performance is affected in one way or the other. Studies conducted to research the influence of employee welfare on performance were based in cities, the garment industry, service firms, and local government, with little focus on the influence of employee welfare on employee performance in public universities. Therefore, there is a knowledge gap on the same that the current study pursues to fill.

However, the studies concentrated on a development company, tertiary institutions, a university, and flower farms. This clearly shows that there is a scarcity of research on the effects of employee communication on employee performance among public universities. The current study seeks to fill this gap by investigating how employee communication affects employee performance in public universities in Nairobi, Kenya. Similarly, the studies conducted to examine the influence of employee participation on employee performance highly focused on other institutions like companies, business establishments, and other organizations, with little focus on public universities. Therefore, the study seeks to fill this knowledge gap through the examination of whether employee participation impacts employee performance in public universities in Nairobi, Kenya.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

1.2.1 General Objective

To find out the influence of employee relations on staff performance in public universities in Nairobi, Kenya.

1.2.2 Specific Objectives

- i. To examine how employee welfare, affects staff's performance in public universities within Nairobi, Kenya
- ii. To determine whether employee communication affects staff's performance in public universities within Nairobi, Kenya
- iii. To examine whether employee participation affects staff's performance in public universities within Nairobi, Kenya

2.0 Literature Review

This section presents the theoretical review, empirical review and conceptual framework.

2.1 Theoretical Review

The study was guided by Human Relation Theory and Scientific Management Theory

2.1.1 Human Relation Theory

Elton Mayo, an Australian psychologist who worked at Hawthorne in the 1920s, founded the human relations management philosophy. This philosophy suggests that fostering supportive social relationships at work and showing employees that they are valued can increase employee motivation and productivity. The human relations theory focuses on the needs of people and how those needs are met. Human beings must be managed interpersonally. Fritz Mary Parker Follet and Professor Elton Mayo collaborated on and proposed depersonalized accountability and authority in order to understand how to manage people effectively (Kahn, Severson & Ruckert, 2009). Elton and Follet argued that employees must use certain communication channels to participate in the decision-making process. They also said that managers must consider employee feedback when resolving disputes so that everyone involved benefits. This study was based on this notion in order to understand how employee relations can be used as tools for increasing employee productivity in organizations (Önday, 2016). The human relations theory helped to examine which employee relations practices are most effective and how they affect employee performance. This was done by examining various employees and departments.

2.1.2 Scientific Management Theory

Increasing staff productivity is a goal of scientific management theory. As stated by the name, this management style uses scientific evaluation methods to measure work processes. Scientific management theory originally originated in the works of mechanical engineer Frederick Winslow Taylor in the 20th century (Waring, 2016). The scientific method is devolved into three-step process; observation, experimentation, and analysis. In the area of science, this might include investigating the effects of a therapy on a patient, trying out an alternate approach, and then evaluating the outcomes. Similar to this, managers investigate the environment in which they operate, test out various approaches of accomplishing the task, and then evaluate the consequences of those changes using scientific management theory (Derksen, 2014). Scientific management theory, when used effectively, boosts productivity. It's an evidence-based strategy that prioritizes dependability and effectiveness. Because there is only one correct way to do a job, scientifically rigorous work procedures provide workers a clear understanding of what is expected of them. Additionally, it provides managers with a constant benchmark against which to measure staff performance (Taylor, 2023). The scientific management theory was used in the three processes step by step, observing different used in different universities as well as different departments within universities. The performance of different universities in terms of efficiency, customer satisfaction and effectiveness were also experimented. Analysis on how different employee relations affect the employee performance was undertaken to come up with the best employee relation strategy that can be employed to achieve optimum performance of employees.

2.2 Empirical Review

This section entails the empirical studies reviewed to identify the gaps which this proposed study intends to fill.

2.2.1 Employee Welfare and Performance

Many studies have contributed significant insights into the domain of employee welfare and its impact on job performance and satisfaction. Pawirosumarto, Sarjana, and Gunawan (2017) conducted a study to examine the relationship between labour social security programmes and job satisfaction among employees in Parador Hotels and Resorts in Indonesia. The findings of their research indicated a positive correlation between these two variables. Almeida and Perera (2015) furthered the investigation in the context of Sri Lanka's garment industry, with a specific emphasis on non-managerial employees. The results of the study further supported the concept that there is a positive correlation between the presence of welfare facilities and levels of job satisfaction. Aarabi, Subramaniam, and Akeel (2013) conducted a study that examined motivating factors within the service industry in Malaysia, adopting a slightly distinct approach. The study conducted by the researchers emphasized the significant role of extrinsic motivators, such as compensation, job security, and a supportive work environment, in predicting job performance.

However, the study also indicates that the lack or insufficiency of welfare programs can exert adverse impacts on employees' levels of job satisfaction and overall performance. Okereke and Daniel (2010) emphasized this assertion by demonstrating that the lack of employee welfare provisions resulted in a decline in both overall morale and productivity. In a study conducted by Njeru (2017) on higher education institutions in Kenya, it was discovered that there exists a noteworthy correlation between non-financial welfare programs, including insurance, pension, and retirement systems, and the performance of employees. In a study conducted by Kemboi (2015) in Nandi County, it was determined that the employees in the region were lacking sufficient provisions for safety, health, and retirement benefits, despite the presence of flexible work schedules for many individuals. The study's results indicated that the insufficient attention given to these welfare components had a notable adverse effect on the provision of services. These studies collectively emphasize the significant impact of employee welfare programs on job satisfaction and performance, either by enhancing or diminishing them.

2.2.2 Employee Communication and Performance

Multiple research studies conducted in diverse industries and nations consistently emphasize the significance of proficient communication in augmenting employee productivity and attaining organizational objectives. Hee et al. (2019) examined various communication styles, namely horizontal, downward, and upward, within a Malaysian property development organization. The researchers discovered that both horizontal and downward communication exhibited a significant positive impact on employee performance. In a study conducted by Arop, Owan, and Akan (2018) in Nigerian tertiary institutions, it was discovered that the effective management of communication is associated with improved human relationships and the successful attainment of organizational objectives. Nebo, Nwankwo, and Okonkwo (2015) also found a noteworthy association between proficient communication and employee performance within the context of Nnamdi Azikiwe University in Nigeria.

Mulili (2018) and Shonubi and Akintaro (2016) conducted studies that broadened the scope of investigation to encompass employee relations within organisational contexts in Rwanda and flower farms in Naivasha, respectively. Mulili (year) conducted a study which revealed that the establishment of open and transparent communication channels between employers and employees is crucial for enhancing work effectiveness. In addition, the study found that the majority of information within organisations is primarily disseminated through Human Resource Management (HRM) divisions. Shonubi and Akintaro (year) assert that in order for communication to be efficacious within an organisational context, it is imperative to prioritise the clarity of ideas prior to engaging in communication, as well as to possess a comprehensive understanding of the intended objectives of the communication. In aggregate, these studies

collectively validate the notion that effective communication is not only advantageous but also indispensable for enhancing work performance and achieving organisational goals successfully.

2.2.3 Employee Participation and Performance

The involvement of employees, commonly known as "employee participation," has a major effect on enhancing the effectiveness of organisations and the productivity of employees (Bieg & Toland, 2021; Wettstein, 2022). Numerous studies have consistently demonstrated that the involvement of employees in the decision-making process yields a multitude of favourable outcomes for organisations. Williamson, Bayne, and Shay (2020) conducted a study which revealed that the involvement of employees in the decision-making process enables organisations to access a wide range of perspectives and knowledge. Consequently, this leads to enhanced decision-making capabilities and an overall improvement in organisational performance. In a study conducted by Sofijanova and Zabijakin-Chatleska (2013) in the Republic of Macedonia, it was discovered that there exists a positive association between employee involvement and perceived organisational success. The study specifically highlights the significance of employing self-managing teams in achieving this positive correlation.

The association between employee participation and heightened productivity and organisational commitment has been established. The study conducted by Ezennaya (2017) provided evidence to support the notion that the inclusion of employees in decision-making processes has a positive impact on productivity within enterprises located in Enugu Urban. Cherono (2017) conducted a study at Unilever Tea Kenya Limited, which confirmed that employee engagement, facilitated by collaborative work committees and unions, had a favourable impact on organisational productivity and growth. Moreover, the study conducted by Miheso and Mukanzi (2020) demonstrated a significant correlation between employee participation and organisational commitment among academic staff members at the Kenya National Library Service. This finding suggests that the influence of employee participation extends beyond specific industries and can have far-reaching implications.

2.2.4 Performance in learning institutions

The significance of academic accomplishment extends beyond personal success, encompassing the advancement of a nation as well. It serves as a pivotal criterion sought by employers in the recruitment of recent graduates (Bieg & Toland, 2021; Gavor, 2015). The calibre of education that students receive establishes the foundation for their future prospects, influencing their decision to pursue further education or enter the workforce. Various factors can exert an influence on academic performance, encompassing a diverse array of elements such as the calibre of educators, the educational milieu, and even the socio-economic circumstances prevailing within a given nation. Donovan (2019) identifies several challenges that afflict the education sector, including insufficiently trained educators, elevated rates of staff turnover, and limited availability of resources. In a similar vein, Kidner (2021) observes that the economic downturn in Nigeria has had an adverse effect on the calibre of education, a crucial factor for the nation's comprehensive societal, economic, and political advancement. The significance of academic accomplishment extends beyond personal success, encompassing the advancement of a nation as well. It serves as a pivotal criterion sought by employers in the recruitment of recent graduates (Bieg & Toland, 2021; Gavor, 2015).

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2.3 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework is used to identify the study's concepts and their relationships (Hughes, Davis & Imenda, 2019). A conceptual framework makes it easy for the reader to comprehend the suggested links between the variables (Kemoni, 2008). It outlines the steps that a company may take to put employee relations strategy into practice. The activities' independent variables include worker participation, communication, and welfare. The dependent variable is workforce performance.

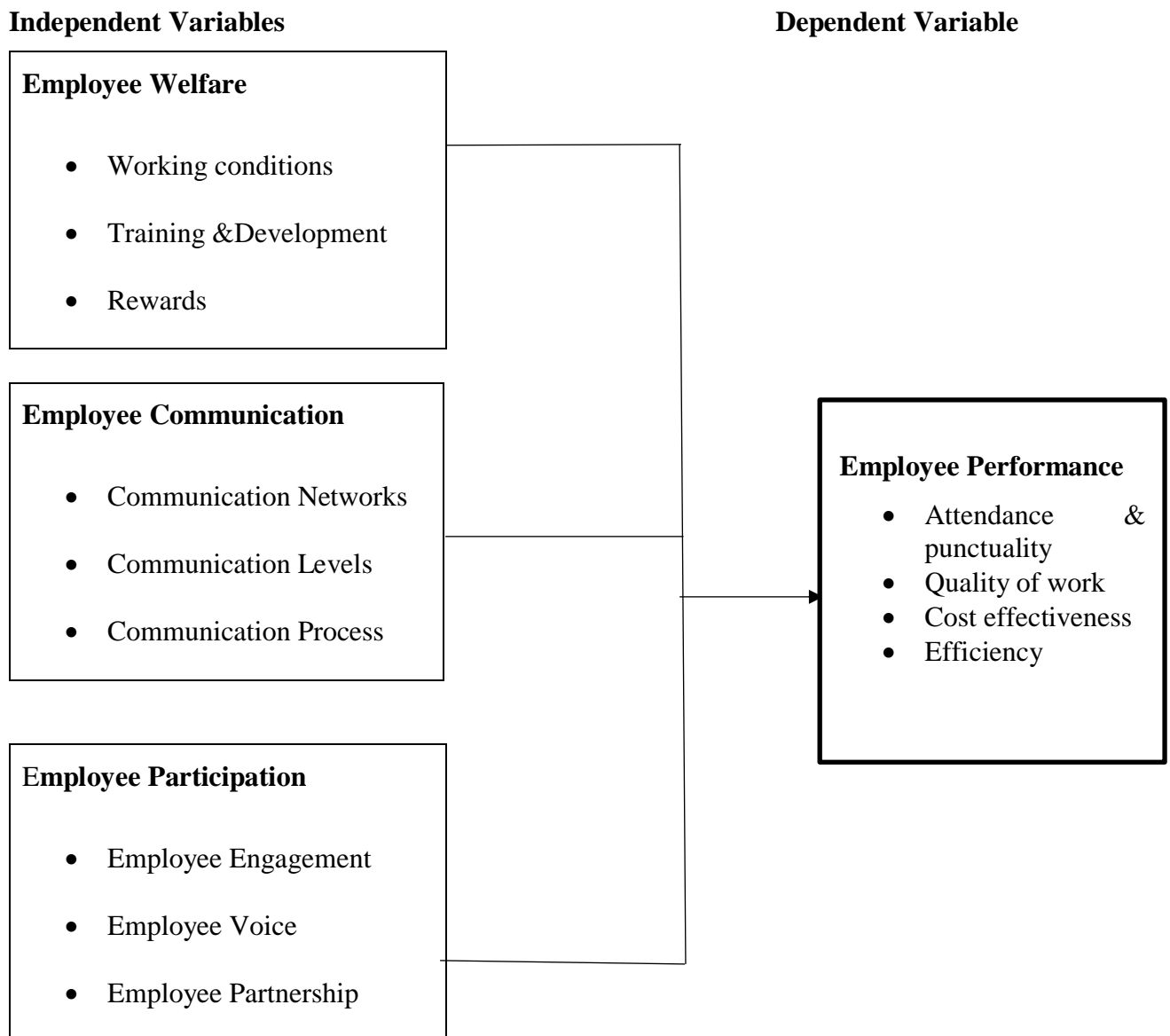


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

3.0 Research Methodology

The study used descriptive survey. The study was conducted in Nairobi. The target population encompassed 11,131 teaching as well as non-teaching staff. Purposive sampling was employed by the researcher in sampling the staff who made up the study respondents and 99 respondents was used as the sample size. The researcher collected data in three phases. The initial phase entailed sampling of public universities within Nairobi for the research prior to reconnaissance visits. The second phase encompassed the definite field work in which public universities within Nairobi was sampled along with the selection of informants within the targeted public universities was done. After sampling of the public universities, the next phase encompasses the gathering of quantitative data via the issuance of questionnaires to the respondents who consented. Both qualitative and quantitative approaches of data analysis was used. Designs, methods, and metrics that don't yield distinct quantitative data are considered to be part of qualitative research. Instead of numbers, the information is presented in words. Data on spatial patterns, socioeconomic trends, and livelihood adaption techniques was collected, as well as information on these topics.

4.0 Findings and Discussions

The study received a 93% response rate from the 99 distributed questionnaires, which is considered excellent according to Babbie (2014). Demographic analysis revealed that the respondents were almost evenly split by gender and were mostly well-educated, with the majority holding PhDs. The largest age group was between 36-55 years old, aligning with Strage and Merdinger's (2015) observation that this age group is often involved in further education or career advancement. Most respondents were married and supportive of career advancement programs, reinforcing Palade's (2010) view on the importance of career development. The study also found a significant presence of non-teaching staff, emphasizing their role in public universities. The majority had been in their current roles for 6-10 years, but only 20% were aware of their university's training budget.

4.1 Correlation Analysis

Pearson's Correlation Coefficient was used to determine the strength of the association between variables, with results presented in Table 1.

Table 4.9: Correlation Analysis

	Employee Performance	Employee Welfare	Employee Communication	Employee Participation
Employee Performance	1.000			
Employee Welfare	0.783	1.000		
Employee Communication	0.803	0.664	1.000	
Employee Participation	0.759	0.702	0.637	1.000
	0.000	0.000	0.000	

The results show that all the study variables are significantly positively correlated. This means that as employee welfare, communication, and participation improve, there is an increase in employee performance. The results of the study align with previous research in the field. For instance, Motyka (2018) found a statistically significant relationship between employee

engagement and various aspects of performance. In addition, the findings support the findings of Shahzad et al. (2018), who emphasized that employee performance can be improved by job satisfaction, which in turn is facilitated by participation in decision-making. Further, the results are consistent with the findings of Joplin et al. (2019), who found that employee entitlement can negatively impact workplace engagement, which in turn can impair job performance.

4.2 Regression Analysis

The study used multiple regression analysis to examine the relationship between employee welfare, employee communication, and employee participation on employee performance. The results of the analysis are presented in Tables 2, 3 and 4.

Table 2: Model summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.888a	0.789	0.782	0.263122

Table 2 shows the results of the multiple linear regression analysis that was conducted to examine the relationship between employee relations and staff performance in public universities in Nairobi, Kenya. The R-squared value of 0.789 indicates that 78.9% of the variance in employee performance is explained by the independent variables. This means that approximately 78.9% of the variation in staff performance can be explained by the employee relations.

Table 3: ANOVA

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	22.81	3	7.603	109.821	.000b
	Residual	6.093	88	0.069		
	Total	28.902	91			

Table 3 shows the ANOVA (analysis of variance) results for the regression model, which indicate the significance of the regression analysis in explaining the variation in staff performance. The results suggest that the independent variables in the model explain a significant amount of the variance in the dependent variable. The F-statistic for the regression model is 109.821, which indicates a significant relationship between employee relations and staff performance. This also indicates that the model is a good fit for the data. The results are also statistically significant at the 0.05 level.

Table 4: Regression Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	0.084	0.162		0.517	0.606
	Employee Welfare	0.315	0.075	0.312	4.179	0.000
	Employee Communication	0.386	0.063	0.424	6.135	0.000
	Employee Participation	0.248	0.067	0.269	3.715	0.000

Table 4 shows the regression coefficients for the multiple linear regression model, which displays the unstandardized coefficients (beta), t-values, and their associated significance

levels. The beta coefficient for employee welfare is 0.315, which means that a one-unit increase in employee welfare is associated with a 0.315-unit increase in employee performance. The p-value for employee welfare is 0.000, which is less than 0.05, indicating that the coefficient is statistically significant at the 0.05 level. This means that there is a less than 5% chance that the observed correlation between employee welfare and employee performance is due to chance. Therefore, employee welfare has a positive and significant effect on employee performance in public universities in Nairobi, Kenya. Similarly, the beta coefficient for employee communication is 0.386, which means that a one-unit increase in employee communication is associated with a 0.386-unit increase in employee performance. The p-value for employee communication is also 0.000, which is less than 0.05, indicating that the coefficient is statistically significant at the 0.05 level. This means that there is a less than 5% chance that the observed correlation between employee communication and employee performance is due to chance. Therefore, employee communication has a significant positive influence on employee performance in public universities in Nairobi, Kenya. Moreover, the coefficient for employee participation is 0.248, indicating that a one-unit increase in employee participation is associated with a 0.248-unit increase in employee performance. The p-value for employee participation is 0.000, which is less than 0.05. Therefore, the coefficient is statistically significant at the 0.05 level, suggesting that employee participation significantly contributes to employee performance in public universities in Nairobi, Kenya. Therefore, the results indicate that all three objectives (employee welfare, employee communication and employee participation) have significant positive effects on employee performance in public universities in Nairobi, Kenya.

The multiple regression equation;

$$Y = 0.084 + 0.315X_1 + 0.386X_2 + 0.248X_3 + \varepsilon.$$

The study findings align with Pawirosumarto, Sarjana and Gunawan (2017) who indicated that labour social security programs significantly and positively impacted the job satisfaction of employees in Parador Hotels and Resorts in Indonesia. The study also aligns with Almeida and Perera (2015) who discovered a positive correlation between welfare facilities and employee work satisfaction in Sri Lanka's garment industry, specifically among non-managerial workers. The study also aligns with previous studies as reported by Hee et al. (2019), Arop, Owan, and Akan (2018), Nebo, Nwankwo, and Okonkwo (2015), and Mulili (2018), collectively support the notion that effective communication plays a crucial role in enhancing employee performance, achieving organizational goals, fostering healthy relationships, and improving overall organizational success. Moreover, the study findings are consistent with studies by Williamson, Bayne, and Shay (2020) and Sofijanova and Zabijakin-Chatleska (2013) demonstrate the positive impact of employee participation on organizational decision-making and effectiveness. Involving employees in decision-making allows organizations to tap into their knowledge and expertise, leading to better judgments, improved performance, and perceived organizational success.

5.0 Conclusions

In conclusion, the study findings demonstrate a significant positive relationship between employee welfare and staff performance in public universities in Nairobi, Kenya. The results suggest that investing in employee welfare, such as providing benefits, services, and facilities, can enhance employee performance. This aligns with previous research highlighting the importance of employee welfare in improving employee welfare initiatives can have a positive impact on staff performance by improving job satisfaction and overall organizational success. When employees feel valued and supported, they are more likely to be engaged in their work and to produce high-quality results. Organizations that prioritize employee welfare initiatives

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can create a supportive work environment that is conducive to productivity and innovation. The study concludes that employee communication plays a crucial role in influencing staff performance in public universities in Nairobi, Kenya. Effective communication channels within the organization positively impact employee performance. This aligns with previous research emphasizing the significance of communication in achieving organizational goals, fostering healthy relationships, and improving overall success. By enhancing communication practices and promoting open dialogue, organizations can facilitate better employee performance and create a more cohesive work environment. The study concludes that there is a significant positive association between employee participation and staff performance in public universities in Nairobi, Kenya. Employee involvement in decision-making processes positively influences performance outcomes. This finding aligns with previous studies emphasizing the positive impact of employee participation on organizational decision-making and effectiveness. By encouraging employee participation, organizations can tap into their knowledge and expertise, leading to improved performance, increased job satisfaction, and perceived organizational success.

6.0 Recommendations

The study recommends universities improve employee performance by focusing on three key areas: welfare, communication, and participation. For welfare, it suggests investing in comprehensive programs offering benefits like healthcare and flexible work arrangements, and continually assessing their effectiveness. For communication, the study advises creating clear channels for dialogue within the organization and offering training to improve communication skills. Lastly, for participation, it recommends creating an inclusive work environment that encourages employee involvement in decision-making and offering development opportunities to enable active participation. These actions aim to create a more positive and productive work environment, leading to improved staff performance and overall university success.

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