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INFLUENCE OF EMPOWERMENT ON EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE: A CASE OF PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS' IN KAKAMEGA CENTRAL DISTRICT, KENYA

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ABSTRACT

Employee empowerment seeks to increase the employees' responsibility, build their morale and improve the quality of their work life by creating a working environment where an employee is allowed to make his own decisions or participate in the decisions of the management in specific work-related situations. Ideally, when an employee feels valued in an organization, he will be more productive, loyal and confident. The main purpose of this study was to establish the influence of employee empowerment on primary school teachers' performance in Kakamega Central District, Kenya. The study used descriptive and correlation survey design to collect data from 164 teachers through questionnaires and document analysis. Data was analysed using frequencies, percentages and Pearson's Product moment correlation coefficient test. The study concluded that the autonomy the teachers' had in their work execution and the impact of their duties had the greatest influence on teachers' performance. Competence, manifested as training, knowledge and skills they possessed had a minimal effect on teachers' performance. The study recommends that employees should be encouraged to value their work and be allowed to participate in decision making especially on issues related to task accomplishment in a bid to enhance their performance.

KEYWORDS

Empowerment, Employee performance.

INTRODUCTION

With increased competition in modern organizations brought by globalization, organizations are forced to make changes and improve their operations to cope with the changing scenarios. To successfully do so, they should not keep their employees in the dark about major decisions affecting them. The organization should involve the employees in the decision making at all levels (Mathieu and Rapp, 2005). Many organizations have shunned "command and control" as a model of leadership. Instead, a more open and collaborative framework that will seek to exploit the various talents and abilities of all the employees especially by involving them in decision making is being embraced. Employees of the organization must be involved in defining objectives and setting the means of achievement (Carter, 2009) if they are to understand the need for being creative and remaining committed to changing their behaviour at work in new and improved ways. Empowering employees therefore serves to create a sense of belonging among the workers as well as a congenial environment where both the management level of the organization and the workers voluntarily contribute to healthy working relations (Noah 2009). In order to improve the employees' commitment and humanise the work place with the intention of improving work performance, managers need to permit a high degree of empowerment.

The Kenyan Government embraced pursuit of Education for All in 2005 through the adoption of the Sessional Paper No. 1 of 2005 (Government of Kenya, 2005). This policy document targets the provision of all inclusive quality education that is accessible and relevant to all Kenyans. At the Primary school level, the key concerns to education are access, retention, equity, quality and relevance as well as internal and external efficiencies within the education system. Primary school teachers, being implementors of the policy are expected to be empowered to enthusiastically play their role in helping the country achieve this endeavour.

STATEMENT OF THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

Research shows that empowerment positively affects employee performance and job satisfaction (Indradevi, 2012; Ugboro and Obeng, 2000; Carless, 2004). Organizations therefore have to ensure that they embrace the practice and facilitate the involvement of employees in organizational goal formulation, task assignment and decision making. The extent to which this practice is appreciated may however differ from one economic or social sector to another. Further, this may depend on the policies and leadership style prevalent in a given organization. Kenyan primary schools face the challenge of weak management and internal inefficiencies (Government of Kenya, 2005). The Education Act assigns the management of primary schools to School Management Committees whose membership includes the head teacher and selected parents' representatives. In most of these schools, the major decisions are undertaken by the head teachers and School Management Committees and rarely do they directly involve the parents and teachers. This can result in a high level of dissatisfaction by the teaching staff especially when the teachers are not empowered nor consulted when major decisions affecting them are undertaken without their involvement. They want to have a say in how the work is carried out and take advantage of opportunities to participate in decision making.

Whereas previous studies in this area have focused on the relationships between employee empowerment and organisational performance in the hotel industry (Chiang and Hsieh, 2012), manufacturing firms, software firms (Indradevi, 2012) and banks (Tutar, Altinoz and Cakiroglu, 2011) little is known about the extent of this relationship particularly among non-profit organizations like public schools. Moreover, results of such research in the Kenyan context are not available. This study sought to fill this gap by establishing the effect of employee empowerment on Primary schools' teachers' performance in Kakamega Central District, Kenya.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study sought to achieve the following objectives:

1. Examine the effect of autonomy on employee performance in the primary schools' education sector.
2. Explain the relationship between staff influence in decision making and employee performance in the primary school education sector.
3. Determine the effect of competence on employee performance in the primary schools' education sector.
4. Establish the relationship between Meaningful work and employee performance in the primary schools' education sector.

STUDY HYPOTHESES

The study tested the following null hypotheses:

- H01 There is no significant relationship between Employee autonomy and employee performance in the primary schools' education sector.
 H02 There is no significant relationship between staff influence in decision making and employee performance in the primary school education sector.
 H03 There is no significant relationship between Competence and employee performance in the primary schools' education sector.
 H04 There is no significant relationship between Meaningful work and employee performance in the primary schools' education sector.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The concept of employee empowerment has received widespread attention from scholars. This is based on the central position employees play in ensuring organizations attain desired performance goals. Empowerment has been seen as an attempt to give staff members more power so as to achieve desired outcomes (Conger and Kanungo, 1988; Ashcraft and Kedrowicz, 2002). It is a special form of delegation in which the sub-ordinate gains greater control and freedom of choice with respect to bridging the communication gap between the management and the workers. It also refers to the degree of employee's involvement in a firm strategic planning activity. Empowerment gives an employee a sense of freedom, autonomy and personal responsibility in determining whatever goes on in the organization. As a result, they are intrinsically motivated to perform tasks for the benefit of the organization (Chiang and Hsieh, 2012) Empowerment gives employees a feeling of freedom, autonomy and personal responsibility in determining whatever goes on in the organization. As a result, they are intrinsically motivated to perform tasks for the benefit of the organization (Chiang and Hsieh, 2012).

According to Spreitzer (1995), empowerment has four dimensions. These include meaning, self determination, competence and impact. Meaning refers to the extent to which an employee attaches value to a given job based on his own standards, beliefs, attitudes or ideals. The greater the meaning, the more committed one will be in the performance of duties. Self-determination on its part refers to the autonomy with which an employee makes decisions about his or her work. Where employees are allowed to decide what is to be done, how a task is to be accomplished and when it is to be done, it gives a sense of ownership which is intrinsically motivating. According to Indradevi (2012), it results in employees being creative and accepting responsibility for their work. Competence refers to the ability one has to perform tasks or responsibilities assigned. It calls for one to be equipped with knowledge, skills and attitudes relevant to perform certain activities. Competence can be gained through participation and investment in various training and development activities (Kamoche, 2001). Lastly, impact refers to the degree to which one can influence outcomes at work as well as the belief that they have real impact on organizational results and outcomes.

Using these four constructs of empowerment, scholars have carried out studies to determine the effect that empowerment has on organizational performance, job satisfaction and team performance. According to Tuuli and Rowlinson (2009), there is a direct and positive relationship between psychological empowerment and employee job performance. To them, employees who are motivated displayed positive performance behaviours which resulted in derived performance. In another study by Indradevi (2012), empowerment was found to predict job performance of employees in the Indian software sector. Specifically, his study found out that meaning and impact were the most important components of empowerment in predicting job performance, followed by autonomy and competence.

A study by Tutar *et al* (2011) also confirmed that employee empowerment predicted the performance of employees in the banking sector in Turkey. Employee empowerment predicted the performance of employees in these entities with employee individual traits such as skills, willingness and creativity predicting their contextual performance. In the same study, meaning had the greatest effect followed by impact, self determination or autonomy and finally competence. These findings are similar to those of Indradevi (2012) in their conclusion of meaning and impact as being the main predictors of employee performance. Another study by Sally and Carless (2004) also established that empowerment affected the relationship between psychological climate and job satisfaction of employees, hence impacting on employee performance. Other studies by Chiang and Hsieh (2012) and Mathieu and Rapp (2005) also point to the predictive characteristic of empowerment on employee performance.

According to Sahoo and Das (2011), empowerment recognizes employees' talents hence increase the degree of their commitment to the organization. It shifts the management of employees from the traditional hierarchical control system to one centred on organizational commitment and driven by self discipline of employees. This is however dependent on the treatment employees received that shows equity and fairness, how challenging the job is, clarity of purpose and congruency (Fornes, Rocco and Wollard, 2008). Most of the reviewed literature relates to studies done in Europe and the East with minimal studies being reported in Africa that explore the relationship between empowerment and employee performance. This scantiness in literature of African studies on the issue affects the generalizability of the findings of earlier studies hence the need for a study touching on the relationship between empowerment and employee performance in the African context.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study used a descriptive survey and correlation research designs to collect data from a sample of 164 primary school teachers who were selected to participate in the study. It utilized stratified and simple random sampling methods to pick the samples. Questionnaires were the main data collection tool. They contained both open ended and closed ended items that sought information on empowerment and teachers' performance. Most of the items on the questionnaires were adapted from the questionnaire on empowerment developed by Spreitzer (1995). Document analysis was also done to triangulate the study especially on teachers' performance where Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE) examination results of various schools in Kakamega Central District, Kenya where the respondents taught were examined. The items of the questionnaires were subjected to Cronbach Alpha coefficient test which yielded an *r*-value of 0.82. This indicated a high reliability value of the questionnaire. The data that was collected from the respondents was then descriptively and inferentially analyzed using frequencies, percentages and Pearson's product moment correlation coefficient test.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The study targeted 210 teachers to be respondents but only 164 of them filled and returned the study questionnaire, representing a 78% response rate. The study captured the respondents' demographic characteristics as shown in Table 1.

TABLE 1: DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF RESPONDENTS

Characteristics	N=164	Frequency	%
Gender	Male	77	46.95
	Female	87	53.05
Age	Below 30 years	27	16.46
	31-40 years	45	27.44
	41-50 years	66	40.24
	Above 50 years	26	15.86
Highest Academic Qualification	P1 Certificate	75	45.73
	Diploma	34	20.73
	Bachelors' Degree	54	32.93
	Masters Degree	01	00.61
	PhD	00	00.00
Teaching Experience	Below 5 years	69	42.07
	6-10 years	25	15.25
	11-15 years	34	20.73
	Above 15 years	36	21.95

Source: Research Study, 2012.

The demographic results show that a majority of the respondents were female, 87(53.05%) and many were aged between 41 and 50 years. People in this age bracket are usually settled in their careers and desire to contribute their knowledge and skills to tasks at the workplace. As a result, they appreciate if their contribution is valued and taken into consideration when making decisions. Most of the respondents also had certificate, 75 (45.73%) and Diploma, 34(20.73%) as their highest academic qualification. Of all the respondents, 54 (32.93%) of them had pursued Bachelors degree level of education, a pointer to the zeal existing among the primary school teachers to enhance their competence. One respondent (00.61%) had a Masters degree.

The study further revealed that most of the respondents had taught for below five years, 69 (42.07%) and between six and ten years, 25 (15.25%). This is an indicator of teachers who are young in the profession and who require approval for whatever they do. They may also need to be granted freedom in determining how they are to accomplish desired tasks.

The study further sought the opinions of respondents on various constructs of empowerment and how they affected employee performance. The respondents were asked to comment on the extent to which they agreed with statements on the issue on a Likert scale ranging from 1-Strongly Disagree to 5-Strongly Agree as shown on Table 2.

TABLE 2: RESPONDENTS PERCEPTION OF EMPOWERMENT AND EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE

Statement	SA(%)	A(%)	U(%)	D(%)	SD(%)
The work I do is important to me.	101(61.59)	34(20.73)	10(6.10)	17(10.37)	02(1.21)
I really care about what I do on my job	111(67.68)	42(25.61)	04(2.44)	07(4.27)	00(00)
My job activities are personally meaningful to me.	99(60.37)	51(31.10)	03(1.83)	11(6.7)	00(00)
I have significant autonomy in determining how I do my job.	25(15.24)	36(21.95)	01(0.61)	22(13.42)	80(48.78)
I can decide on my own on how I go about doing my job.	21(12.80)	43(26.22)	06(3.66)	33(20.12)	61(37.20)
I have considerable opportunity for independence and freedom in how I do my job.	25(15.24)	34(20.73)	05(3.05)	46(28.05)	54(32.93)
I have a chance to use personal initiative in carrying out my work.	27(16.46)	31(18.90)	08(4.88)	51(31.10)	47(28.66)
I have great control on what happens in my school.	24(14.63)	35(21.34)	04(2.44)	47(28.66)	54(32.93)
My opinion counts in departmental decision making processes.	19(11.58)	28(17.07)	03(1.83)	56(34.15)	58(35.37)
My opinion counts in school decision making process.	31(18.90)	04(2.44)	03(1.83)	02(1.22)	78(47.56)
My impact on what happens in school is large.	42(25.61)	06(3.66)	03(1.83)	41(25)	72(43.90)
I am confident about my abilities to do my job.	121(73.78)	35(21.34)	00(00)	08(4.88)	00(00)
My job is well within the scope of my abilities.	130(79.26)	04(2.44)	01(0.61)	17 (10.37)	12(07.32)
I have mastered the skills necessary for my job.	119(72.56)	39(23.78)	02(1.22)	02(1.22)	02(1.22)
I am self-assured about my capabilities to perform my work activities.	123(75.00)	29(17.68)	00(00)	10(06.10)	02(1.22)
I have personally contributed to my school's excellence in academics.	131(79.88)	21(12.80)	00(00)	11(06.71)	01(0.61)
I have received personal recognition for my school's performance in academics and co-curricular activities.	110(67.07)	32(19.51)	00(00)	09(5.49)	13 (7.93)
The mean score of my school in KCPE has improved every year.	38(23.17)	70 (42.68)	01(0.61)	13(07.92)	43(26.22)

Key: SD-Strongly Disagree, D-Disagree, U-Undecided, A-Agree, SA-Strongly Agree

Source: Research study, 2012.

The results on Table 2 indicate that most of the respondents were in agreement that the work they do meant a lot to them. A majority of them, 101 (61.59%), strongly agreed with the statement on the importance of the work they do to them. This highlights the meaning they attach to the job. Ninety nine (60.37%) of them strongly agreed that the job activities personally had meaning to them. However, the study established that the respondents were not given autonomy in determining how they were to undertake tasks. Many of them strongly disagreed, 54(32.93%) and disagreed, 33(20.12%) respectively with the statement on whether they were allowed to decide on their own on how to go about doing their job. A majority of them further disagreed, 51(31.10%) and strongly disagreed, 47(28.66%) respectively with the statement that sought to find out if the teachers got a chance to use personal initiative in carrying out their work. This results pointed to a scenario where teachers' creativity was not encouraged and nurtured hence the respondents were left to undertake tasks as per the dictates of others.

The respondents further felt that they had no control over what happened in their schools. Their opinions did not count in departmental matters as highlighted by 56(34.15%) respondents who disagreed and 58(35.37%) who strongly disagreed with a statement that stated the contrary. Their opinion was similar on matters concerning decision making processes affecting their schools. From an empowerment perspective, this meant that the respondents felt that they lacked impact in the outcome of their work.

Lastly, further descriptive analysis showed that the respondents felt they had the required competence to perform their work. In response to the statement as to whether they had mastered the skills necessary for the job, 119(72.56%) strongly agreed and 39(23.78%) agreed with the statement on the issue. This corroborates their response with regard to their highest qualification in Table 1 where all of them had at least P1 Certificate level of training, the requisite minimum qualifications needed for one to teach in a primary school in Kenya. They therefore had the basic skills and training needed to perform their job.

In general, there was agreement among the respondents that they had personally contributed to the performance of their school both in academic and co-curricular activities. As a result most of them had been recognized for their individual contribution as noted by 110(67.07%) of the respondents who strongly agreed and 32(19.51%) respondents respectively who agreed with the statement on the issue as shown on Table 2.

HYPOTHESES TESTS

Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Test was used to test the study hypotheses. The results of the tests are presented in Table 3.

TABLE 3: CORRELATION BETWEEN EMPOWERMENT AND EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE

	Impact	Meaning	Competence	Autonomy	
Employee Performance	Pearson's Correlation(r)	0.779	0.638	0.543	0.689
	Sig. (2 tailed)	0.001	0.001	0.001	0.001
	N	164	164	164	164

Source: Research study 2012

From the findings of the tests, it can be deduced that empowerment constructs namely autonomy, competence, meaning and impact have a positive and significant relationship with employee performance. Influence/impact had the greatest influence on employee performance (r=0.779, p=0.001) followed by autonomy (r=0.689, p=0.001), meaning (0.638) and competence (0.543, p=0.001). Based on the findings, all the four null hypotheses were rejected and the alternative ones accepted. This led to the study to conclude that employee autonomy, competence, influence in decision making and meaningful work had a strong and positive influence on employee performance.

These findings concur with earlier studies done in different contextual environments that held that empowerment had an effect on employee performance (Indradevi, 2012; Tutar, et al, 2011; Sahoo and Das, 2011; Tuuli and Rowlinson, 2009). The findings however differ with these earlier studies in the ranking of the

specific constructs of empowerment and their impact on employee performance. In this study, unlike that by Tutar *et al* (2011) and Indradevi (2012), Impact had the greatest on employee performance followed by autonomy or self determination. In this Kenyan context in the Primary School education sector therefore, the impact of the teachers had the greatest influence on employee performance, highlighting the importance the teachers place in carrying out their duties. To them, the benefit that will accrue to their clients, that is, their pupils was paramount hence their focus to meaningfully execute their tasks with dedication. Their contribution in decision making also had an influence in their job performance hence they felt disappointed if their effort was not appreciated. The degree to which they were allowed autonomy in performance of their duty therefore played a critical role in determining their performance.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study concluded that employee empowerment had an effect on their performance. Specifically, the impact of tasks performed by employees and the extent to which they were given autonomy and allowed to be independent and free in performing tasks greatly contributed to their performance.

Based on the foregoing, the study recommends that employee empowerment be encouraged by organizations in general since it is a great predictor of organizational performance. In the education sector in particular, teachers should be allowed to participate in decision making, goal setting and task assignment. The tasks assigned should be designed in such a way that they are meaningful to the performer as well as leave room for them to be creative in task accomplishment.

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