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Original Article

### Effect of Physical Work Conditions on the Work Performance of Academic Staff in Private Universities in Kenya

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#### Keywords:

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Universities.

The working conditions (physical and psychological) in an organization have key linkage with and work performance including academic institutions. The aim of this paper was to examine the effect of physical working conditions and performance of academic staff in private universities in Kenya. The study is informed by Fredrick Herzberg's two factor theory on motivation of employees and work performance. The study research design is descriptive that incorporates quantitative and qualitative methods. The target population for this study involved academic staff of selected private universities in Kenya. Considering the target population was high, a sample size was chosen who were selected using stratified and purposive sampling technique. The data has been collected using questionnaire. Data analysis has been undertaken using descriptive statistics and thematic content analysis. The study has found out that physical working conditions are a key determinant of employee performance in private universities in the country. Those universities with poor physical working conditions reported poor work performance amongst their academic staff compared to those that had conducive physical working conditions. The paper recommends that for private universities to remain competitive in the tertiary education sector, they have to ensure that the physical working conditions of school facilities are conducive for use by their members of staff. There is also need for the Commission for University Education in Kenya to regularly inspect universities physical infrastructure to ensure they are fit for use by both academic staff, non-academic staff and students. When all these recommendations are addressed, the academic staff productivity would significantly improve.

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**INTRODUCTION**

Education occupies the most strategic position in Kenya's achievement of national development goals and Vision 2030. Hence, university education performs a critical role in this regard. The main aim of university education is provision of professional knowledge and training for development of individual and society at large (Uchendu, Nnaji & Nwafor, 2016). The delivery of university education is undertaken largely through public universities (mainly funded by government exchequer) and private universities (that depend on student fees to run their programmes). The private university sector is performing critical role in provision of tertiary education to students through development of various skills required to transform their lives, be prepared for future careers and transform their communities. Considering the lack of adequate public universities to admit all students in their programmes, private universities have come in to fill this gap. This means that they perform a critical role towards ensuring that country's education goals are attained. The attainment of university education goals in Kenya largely depends on the level of performance and productivity of its academic staff. a

Employees work performance is usually regarded as key success factors of an organization and is defined as a measure of the amount of output produced per unit of input (Toyib, 2016). Work performance can be defined as efficiency, effectiveness and quality of services turned out of a production process (Uchendu et al., 2016). In education sector, it is the extent to which the academic goals of the institution are attained through the work of academic and non-academic staff. For work to be done, inputs have to be brought so as to bring the desired output (work performance). In academic institutions, work performance is a function of methods, techniques,

workforce skills, knowledge, aptitude, and attitude. The input variables in universities consist of having adequate number of human capitals, technology, time, finance, equipment, infrastructure, energy and materials, while students are the output of the system as well as raw materials with which institutions are characterized as educational (Uchendu et al., 2016).

Competition within the university education sector in Kenya (between private and public) requires that academic staff work innovatively, smart, and better. As competition and economic conditions becomes more tough, universities can no longer waste the value of their academic staff (Shaari et al., 2022). For the private university to survive in these tough conditions coupled with limited government funding to private university students, the university management needs to pay closer attention to the performance of its academic staff and develop a work environment which permit them to utilize their best talents to work. This means that work environment significantly influences the work performance of employees. Chandrasekar (2011) intimated that work environment significantly influence performance by employees in both negative and positive ways. Hence, it was essential for this paper to assess how work environment influences the academic staff performance in private universities in Kenya. There are two main components of work environment, the physical and the behavioural. The behavioural working environment are features relating to the way employees in an organization associate amongst themselves and how the organization environment influences the way employee behaves (Haynes, 2018). Behavioural environment can be divided into interaction or distraction. The physical work environment components include features relating to the capacity of employees of a particular

organization to connect with the environment in their offices (Gachui et al., 2020). This physical environment can be categorized into two; layout and comfort of the office space.

Haynes (2018) argues that a physical work environment includes a well-designed, friendly, safe physical space, better equipment and effective communication, which will improve work performance of members of staff. Well designed, organized offices and work areas make significant differences to how employees feel about their work (Armstrong & Murlis, 2017). A bad physical work environment can give some depressing messages about how much the institution value its members of staff and the standards it expects from them (Nwambe & Nwuzor, 2022). Tayfun and Oneren (2021) indicated that physical work environment performs an influential role in determining workers' performance as it influences their job satisfaction. There is no doubt that the physical work environment greatly influences employee work performance including those working in the academic sector. Hence, it was critical to undertake a research study into how physical work environments specifically in private higher education institutions assist workers to perform better (Shaari et al., 2022). This paper centers on establishing how physical environment affects the performance of academic staff in private universities.

### **Problem Statement**

The physical work environment is where most employees conduct their day-to-day operations in organizations. A conducive and comfortable work environment permit employees to work optimally to attain individual and institutional goals. Some of the physical work environmental variables that may affect the working situation in an organization include; physical space, office furniture, working equipment, lighting, air and temperature circulation, cleanliness of rooms, accessibility of the institution infrastructure, among others (Atmaja & Puspitawati, 2018). When they are provided in the required condition, size and quantity, the employees will perform

their jobs well and hence institutional goals will be attained. The work performance of academic staff in universities is determined by effectiveness in academic instruction and methods, master of the subject matter, lecture halls management, technology use, students' assessment, involvement in university academic committees, participation in conference, publication of books and journals in refereed publishers and writing of successful proposal for research grants in their institutions (Uchendu et al., 2016). When there is high workplace performance by academic staff, the university will admit more students, and many will graduate after completing their undergraduate and post-graduate programmes.

Research shows that there have been performance challenges in Kenya's private universities with public universities being ranked highly in the web metrics. These ranking measures how academic institutions are contributing to the knowledge through publication of scholarly works. Incidents of private universities closing their campuses have been the order of the day in recent years. Achievement of academic be metrics targets is an issue that requires that physical workplace environment to be conducive for operations by academic members of staff. The lack of adequate and conducive physical working environment may also affect the academic members of staff ability to discharge their teaching capacities to students hence resulting to poor performance of their universities. Limited research has explored how physical working environment affects academic staff work performance in private universities, a focus of this paper in the Kenyan context.

### **Purpose of the Paper**

The aim of this paper is to examine the effect of physical working conditions on the performance of academic members of staff in private universities in Kenya.

### **Conceptual Literature Review**

#### **Physical Work Conditions and Performance of Academic Staff**

The workplace is an important component of any employee's work life. Academic staff in private universities like all other employees spend much of their time at the workplace and this is bound to affect them in one way or another. According to Haynes (2018), an organization's productivity can be improved by 5%-10% by upgrading the physical design of the workplace. Research has also found that several environmental factors such as noise, colour, temperature and use of indoor plants influence the wellbeing and performance of employees (Kamrulzaman, 2011). The physical work environment can influence feelings of safety, security and comfort or conversely may contribute to feelings of irritation, anxiety, sadness and discomfort. A supportive environment and an attractive work atmosphere give increase to the employee's ability to put to use their knowledge, skills and competences to execute efficiency (Muhondwa, Leshabari, MWangu, Mbembati & Ezekiel, 2008).

### **Empirical Review of Literature**

This section reviews empirical review of related literature on the influence of physical work conditions on the performance of employees in organizations; including academic ones from different geographical contexts of the world. In Indonesia, Toyib (2016) determined the influence of the physical work environment on employee productivity. The findings explained that the physical work environment influenced on employee productivity. In Enugu state Nigeria, Uchendu et al. (2016) ascertained the relationship between physical work environment and academic staff productivity in universities. Results showed a significant relationship between physical work environment in terms of library facilities and classroom space and academic staff productivity.

In Ogun State, Oluwunmi and Gbarayeghe (2022) evaluated the influence of office layout on staff performance with a focus on the academic staff of Covenant University. It was discovered that the academic staff perceived all the ten office layout elements presented to them to be good. The results also showed that office layout, reliable internet

and office furniture are among the crucial factors influencing academic staff performance. Conclusively it was revealed that office layout has a significant impact on performance. Nwambe and Nwuzor (2022) studied effects of physical and social environments on staff productivity: a study of the academic staff of the Ebonyi State University. The result showed that the provision of comfortable offices to academic staff of the University helped in the improvement of their work performance and that well-ventilated lecture halls entice lecturers to frequently teach the students in the University. Another research in southwestern Nigeria, Adebowale et al. (2023) examined the influence of physical work environment on the research productivity of librarians in universities. The results indicated that the librarians' research productivity was significantly influenced by their surroundings at work. This means that environmental conditions play a significant role in influencing academic staff work productivity.

In Mutare Zimbabwe, Bigirimana et al. (2018) did a cross-sectional study of the effects of working conditions on academic staff motivation at Africa University. The study revealed that the working conditions were unfavorable. Motivation was downplayed by factors such as uncompetitive salaries, non-collegiality decision-making, opportunity in career development and academic freedom. Kasule (2015) study was to establish the impact of the prevalent work environment on academic staff job performance in Ugandan public universities, using Kyambogo University as a case. It has been established that at Kyambogo University such factors exist at a low level, this situation ought to be alleviated. It has also been established that the prevalent work environment significantly affects the job performance of dons. Accordingly, university management as a matter of top priority, should endeavor to put in place favourable work environment, if they want their institutions to be effective and efficient.

Gachui et al. (2020) sought to establish the effect of work environment and career progression on employee performance at the Ministry of Education in Kenya. The study found that work



environment positively and significantly influences employee performance at the ministry of education headquarters in Kenya and career progression positively and significantly influences employee performance at the ministry of education headquarters in Kenya.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This paper is anchored on Fredrick Herzberg's (1959) two factor theory of motivation. The theory examines the association between employees' work satisfaction and productivity. Herzberg suggests that satisfaction and dissatisfaction of employees in their work is determined by two factors; hygiene factors and motivators. Hygiene factors involve working conditions and salary. When these conditions are not met by the employer, employees are dissatisfied. Herzberg two factor theory significantly relates with this paper since it focuses on physical work conditions and academic staff work performance. When both the hygiene factors are present in the university physical work environment, members of academic staff who are human elements would ultimately experience feeling of satisfaction and hence be motivated to put in their best on the job which will enhance work performance. Uchendu et al. (2022) implored that lack of professional commitment and enthusiasm from universities academic staff can be traced to the poor stage of their physical working conditions. This means that the condition of physical facilities in universities would be a great source of motivation. Inadequacy of physical facilities would be as source of disenchantment and frustration of the academic staff in the universities. For university to run the academic programmes well, they need to ensure that their academic staff have proper and well-conditioned facilities. When these conditions are met, the performance goals would be attained as academic staff will be motivated to perform their duties hence improved work performance.

### **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The design was adopted due to the fact that it affords the researcher to carry an in-depth knowledge and understanding of the subject matter of the research study. The target population for this study is all the academic staff in private universities in Kenya. These consist of both the male and female academic staff. Kenya has 30 chartered private universities that are spread across the country though most of them are situated in Nairobi City. Two sampling techniques were used in this study. First, the study identified all the private universities in Kenya (30 in number) then by use of simple random sampling and selected one third (10 universities) to be involved in this study. Secondly, purposive sampling was used in selecting all the 750 academic staff in the 10 private universities. The research instrument used in the study was 3-scale Likert questionnaire. The items on the selected workplace stressors and work performance Questionnaire (WSWP) as represented by the physical working conditions. Data was analyzed using the SPSS computer program. The data, which is quantitative was summarized and presented using descriptive statistics including percentages, frequency distribution tables and figures.

### **RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

The data for this study was collected using a questionnaire. Out of 30 private chartered universities, were one third (10 universities) were sampled. The number of participants was 750 that were purposively sampled from the 10 universities. The response rate was 85.3 % or 640 participants. The study sought to find out the gender of academic staff who participated in this study. The results are presented in Table 1

**Table 1: Gender of Academic Staff**

Gender	Frequency	Percent
Male	350	54.7
Female	290	45.3
Total	640	100

Findings in Table 1 show that 350 (54.7%) of the participants were male whereas 290 (45.3%) were female. The result suggests that the private universities have made sure that gender equality is represented in their academic positions.

The objective of the study was to assess the effect of the physical work conditions on work performance of academic staff in private universities. To achieve this objective, the

following research question was asked; what is the effect of physical work conditions on the work performance of academic staff in private universities? The participants were asked to respond to ten statements that were indicating their feelings on the effect physical work conditions on academic staff on their work performance. The results of the descriptive analysis are shown in

**Table 2. Description of Effects of Physical Working Conditions on Performance**

Physical Working Conditions	Agree		Undecided		Disagree	
	Freq	Percent	Freq	Percent	Freq	Percent
Work equipment and tools are appropriate and effective	400	62.5	150	23.4	90	14.0
Furniture is comfortable and in good condition	370	57.8	140	21.8	130	20.3
Work processes and systems are not conducive	350	54.6	200	31.2	90	14.0
Technology adopted is up to date and reliable	450	70.3	160	25.0	30	4.6
I am satisfied with the equipment and technology	510	79.6	92	14.3	38	5.9
The physical environment is conducive for working	500	78.1	95	14.8	45	7.0
I feel safe and comfortable in my working space	490	76.5	90	14.0	60	9.3
The best hygiene levels are observed at the institution	420	65.6	170	26.5	50	7.8
Noise pollution is minimal at the institution	490	76.5	50	7.8	100	15.6
Weather and atmosphere are conducive for work	570	89.0	10	1.5	60	9.3

The results show that the majority, 400 (62.5%) of the respondents agreed that the work equipment in the institution is appropriate and effective, 150 (23.4%) were undecided while 90 (14.0%) disagreed. The result implies that most private universities have ensure that the equipment used by their academic staff is appropriate to enable them conduct instruction hence improved work productivity. Secondly, most of the respondents 370 (57.8) agreed that the furniture is comfortable

and in good condition. 140 (21.8%) were undecided whereas 130 (20.3%) disagreed. The result shows that efforts have been made the universities management to ensure that furniture in officers and lecture halls are comfortable for use by the academic staff. This will enable them to perform their academic duties with ease hence improved performance.

Again, the majority 350 (54.6%) agreed with statement that work processes and systems are not conducive while 200 (31.1%) were undecided. However, only 90 (14.0%) disagreed. This means that universities management have made strides in ensuring that work processes are conducive and seamless to allow smooth operations. Considering bureaucracy and systemic barriers usually demotivate employees, most private universities have addressed these concerns hence improved job satisfaction. The majority 450 (70.3%) also tended to agree with the statement that technology adopted and utilized by the institution is up to date and reliable whereas 160 (25%) were undecided. Only 30 (4.6 %) disagreed with the statement. The result suggests that most private universities have ensure that they have installed up to date technological infrastructure to enable their academic staff work online and undertake their lecture duties using blended learning approach. This creates competitive edge as the academic staff can integrate technology in their instruction.

Relatedly, 510 (79.6%) while 92 (14.8%) were undecided and 38 (5.9%) of the respondents disagreed with the statement that they were satisfied with the technology installed in their universities. This means that as condition of Herzberg theory, most academic staff in the universities studied are satisfied with the condition and state of their technological infrastructure. The results further showed that the majority 420 (65.6%) agreed that the best hygiene levels are observed in the institution while 170 (26.5%) were undecided. The minority 50 (7.8%) disagreed with the statement. This means that clean and conducive learning atmosphere is provided by the private universities hence allowing academic staff to perform their duties with ease and satisfaction.

The second last statement was whether noise pollution is minimal in the institution. The majority 490 (76.5%) agreed with this statement whereas 50 (7.8%) were undecided. The remaining 100 (15.6%) disagreed with the statement. The result suggests that noise pollution has been properly addressed as most private universities are located in their own campuses

away from disruption found in crowded buildings. The last statement was on whether the weather and the atmosphere are conducive for work whereby the majority 570 (89.0%) agreed with the statement while only 10 (1.5%) were undecided. Those who disagreed with the statement were 60 (9.3%). This seems to suggest that there are private universities whose physical conditions were not favourable to employees thus resulting in work stress.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The result of this paper has shown that efforts have been made by private universities to ensure that physical work environmental conditions are good for working. Study results have shown that the universities have ensure that the working areas are spacious, well-lit and free of noise (among other interruptions) to allow quality learning to take place. Additionally, the study has established that universities infrastructure is technologically linked to support both physical and virtual learning. This has resulted to improve in work performance by academic staff. Universities with adequate and appropriate physical environmental conditions perform well compared to those that have poor physical working conditions. It is therefore concluded that there exist positive effect of physical work conditions and performance of academic staff of private universities in Kenya. The paper recommends that for private universities to remain competitive in the tertiary education sector, they must ensure that the physical working conditions of are conducive for use by their members of staff. There is also need for the Commission for University Education in Kenya to regularly inspect universities physical infrastructure to ensure they are fit for use by both academic staff, non-academic staff, and students.

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