

**EMPLOYEE RELATIONS PRACTICES AND ACADEMIC STAFF PERFORMANCE
OF PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES: A CASE OF GULU UNIVERSITY**

BY

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APRIL, 2021

DECLARATION

I, **Margreat Anena Phoebe**, declare that dissertation is my original work and has not been published or submitted to any University or Institution of higher learning for any award.

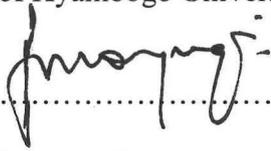
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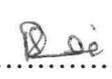
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APPROVAL

This is to certify that this dissertation has been done under our supervision and has met dissertation requirements of Kyambogo University and is now ready for submission.

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Dr. Regis Zombeire

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my guardians; Ms. Rose Lokwiya, Mr. Geoffrey Lakony and my daughters; Christian Amongin, Rwotomiya Favour Petra, Agenorwot Fortunate Joy and all my dependants who have stood with me up to this point of my academic journey.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

DECLARATION.....	i
APPROVAL	ii
DEDICATION.....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGMENT	iv
TABLE OF CONTENTS	v
LIST OF TABLES	x
LIST OF FIGURES	xi
LIST OF ACRONYMS	xii
ABSTRACT.....	xiii
CHAPTER ONE	1
INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.0 Introduction.....	1
1.1 Background to the study	1
1.1.1 Historical background.....	1
1.1.2 Theoretical background	3
1.1.3 Conceptual background	4
1.1.4 Contextual background	5
1.2 Statement of the problem.....	6
1.3 Objective of the study	7
1.4 Specific objectives	7
1.5 Research hypothesis.....	8

1.6 Significance of the study.....	8
1.7 Scope of the Study	9
1.7.1 Content Scope	9
1.7.2 Geographical Scope	9
1.7.3 Time Frame	9
1.8 Organization of the study	9
1.9 Conceptual Framework.....	10
1.10 Definition of terms	11
CHAPTER TWO	12
LITERATURE REVIEW	12
2.0 Introduction.....	12
2.1 Theoretical review	12
2.1.1 The human relations approach.....	12
2.1.2 The Equity theory	13
2.2 Review of related literature.....	13
2.2.1 The effect of employee communication on academic staff performance	14
2.2.2 The effect of conflict resolution on academic staff performance	16
2.2.3 The effect of employee empowerment on the academic staff performance	17
2.3 Literature gap	19
CHAPTER THREE	20
METHODOLOGY	20

3.0 Introduction.....	20
3.1 Research design	20
3.2 Study population.....	20
3.3 Sample size	21
3.4 Sampling Techniques and procedure	21
3.5 Data sources	22
3.6 Data collection instrument	22
3.6.1 Self-administered questionnaire.....	22
3.6.2 Interview guide	23
3.7 Validity and Reliability of the instruments.....	23
3.7.1 Reliability of instruments.....	23
3.7.2 Validity of instruments	24
3.8 Procedures of data collection.....	24
3.9 Data Analysis	25
3.10 Measurement of variables.....	25
3.10.1 Independent variable.....	25
3.10.2 Dependent variable	26
3.11 Ethical Considerations	26
3.12 Limitations	27
CHAPTER FOUR.....	28
DATA ANALYSIS, PRESENTATION, INTERPRETATION OF RESULTS	28
4.0 Introduction.....	28

4.1 Response rate	28
4.2 Background information	28
4.3 Descriptive statistics for employee relations practices and academic staff performance	31
4.4 Relationship between study variables	35
4.5 Regression analysis	37
4.5.1 The effect of employee communication on academic staff performance	37
4.5.2 The effect of conflict resolution on academic staff performance	39
CHAPTER FIVE	44
SUMMARY, DISCUSSIONS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	44
5.0 Introduction.....	44
5.1 Summary of the findings.....	44
5.2 Discussion of findings.....	45
5.2.1 The effect of employee communication on academic staff performance	45
5.2.2 The effect of conflict resolution on academic staff performance	46
5.2.3 The effect of employee empowerment on academic staff performance	47
5.3 Conclusion	48
5.4 Recommendations.....	48
5.5 Area of further research	49
REFERENCES.....	50
APPENDIX 1: SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE	57
APPENDIX 2: INTERVIEW GUIDE.....	61

**APPENDIX 3: KREJCIE AND MORGAN TABLES FOR SAMPLE SIZE
DETERMINATION 62**

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Population and sample size distribution	21
Table 2: Reliability tests	23
Table 3: Sample characteristics	29
Table 4: Descriptive statistics on employee communication.....	31
Table 5: Descriptive statistics on conflict resolution.....	33
Table 6: Descriptive statistics on employee empowerment.....	34
Table 7: Descriptive statistics on conflict resolution.....	35
Table 8: Correlation results of study variables	36
Table 9: Regression results on the effect of employee communication on academic staff performance	38
Table 10: Regression results on the effect of conflict resolution on academic staff performance	40
Table 11: Regression results on the effect of employee empowerment on academic staff performance	42

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: The conceptual framework showing the effect of Employee relations practices on the academic staff performance	10
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LIST OF ACRONYMS

CVI Content validity index

SD Standard deviation

ABSTRACT

This study sought to establish the effect of Employee relations practices on the academic staff performance of public universities in Uganda drawing on a case of Gulu University. The specific objectives of the study were; (a) to examine the effect of Employee communications on the academic staff performance of Gulu University, (b) to investigate the effect of Conflict resolution on the academic staff performance of Gulu University and (c) to examine the effect of Employee empowerment on the academic staff performance of Gulu University. The study adopted three hypotheses that were tested based on the objectives. The study was guided by two theories of human relations and equity theory. The study used a case study design where both quantitative and qualitative data was collected from a sample of 160 staff of the university were randomly selected using simple random sampling method. Regression analysis was used to address study objectives. Findings revealed that employee communication is a significant predictor of academic staff performance. It also revealed that conflict resolution significantly predicts academic staff performance and lastly it was revealed that employee empowerment also significantly predicts academic staff performance. The study concluded that universities that add more efforts on ensuring proper communication between employees, resolve conflicts amongst employees and empower their staff to make decisions are observed to report high levels of academic staff performance. The study therefore recommends Gulu university to strengthen the communication channels and procedures across the entire university so that the staff members can easily express their views and receive immediate feedback from management. It should also develop and strengthen the conflict management strategies in the institution especially at departmental levels. Lastly, the university should continuously empower staff through calling them upon to contribute in the brainstorming sessions at the departments

Key words: Communication, conflict resolution, empowerment and academic staff performance

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

This study sought to establish the effect of Employee relations practices on the academic staff performance of Public Universities in Uganda drawing on a case of Gulu University. The sections in this chapter included; the background of the study, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, study objectives, research questions, scope of the study, significance of the study, conceptual framework, and definition of key terms.

1.1 Background to the study

The background of this study was drawn from the Historical, Theoretical, Conceptual and Contextual perspective

1.1.1 Historical background

Employee relations practices

The concept of Employee relations gained tremendous recognition in the 1980s when industrial relations was renamed to employee relations (Ackers, 2014). It is believed that the signs of Employee relations cropped from industrial relations that was suggested by Dunlop and Lee (2004) where in his analysis of social systems that clashed with political and economic systems impacted on industrial relations. In addition, industrial relations consisted of unchanged elements such as certain actors, contexts which bonded industrial relations with a body of rules at work place. It was therefore because of this unchanged factors that resulted into the renaming of industrial relations into employee relations (Chand & Katou, 2007).

Chand and Katou (2007) point that industrial relations which also refers to employment relations was a term that defined the relationship between workers and employers and its origin is traced way back after industrial revolution that witnessed large scale industry and competition. This is believed to be in the mid-18th to the mid-19th century where businesses had a lot to manage the relationship between employees and managers and also integrate labor unions as parties to the relationship if they were to compete favorably in the industry.

Some scholars such as Sutanto and Kurniawan (2016) based on unitarist perspective of industrial relations to explain the origin of concept of employee relations. In this unitarist perspective, organization is perceived with an idea of “one family” in which both employees and managers should have clear relations and they should share common goals which involve mutuality. In addition, the unitarist perspective emphasizes the need for employee loyalty which renders the role of trade unions unnecessary.

The academic staff Performance

Several sources suggest that performance measurement was introduced in the early 19th century after World War 1 by WD Scott in 1950 (Alach, 2017; McIntyre, Rogers, & Heier, 2001). It is suggested that Scot developed several ways of measuring employee performance however, his ways were considered informal not until 1960s when more formal mechanisms were introduced for instance self-appraisal systems were introduced to understand the staff performance which were geared more towards looking at what a staff might be able to achieve in the future (Alach, 2017). During the 1970s, there was a lot of criticism about how appraisals were being conducted at the universities. Therefore, in early 2000s universities started focusing on academic staff performance measurement which led to a gradual rise in the academic staff service delivery, publications and efficiency (McIntyre et al., 2001). In recent years, Gulu university academic

performance has evolved even further, with many research publications registered by individual staff and teaching done on time (Wood, 1990). With mobile technology giving academic staff more flexibility approach to service delivery not until of recent when the academic staff performance started declining (Acquaah, Zoogah, Kwesiga, Nambi, Karuhanga, & Werner, 2013).

1.1.2 Theoretical background

This study was guided by Human Relations Theory. This theory has been applied in various studies and found to be relevant in explaining the various Human Relations concepts that influence the performance of organizations. The human relations theory was put forward by Mayo (1920) during his series of studies at the Hawthorne Works of the Western Electric Company in Chicago that aimed at discovering organization's motivation when workers know that they are being watched when carrying out their activities (Adair, 1984).

The theory urged that workers level of motivation was not largely influenced by working conditions but rather employee's perception of social feeling and appropriate management styles. Furthermore, the theory suggests that organizations that put focus on workers informal group, build favorable social environment for employees and create the friendless and association amongst co-workers would register an increase in performance.

In addition, the theory also established that flexible interactions between supervisors and employees also helps to boost worker's productivity. Managers are urged to provide job security, recognition which are assumed to induce commitment amongst workers to achieve organizational goals. The theory points out the need to bring together the individual and the social relations into focus at a time when an organization does not recognize worker's contribution towards achieving the goals of the organization (Tirintetaake, 2017)

The theory therefore was found to be relevant to this study because it promotes the idea that employee are vital resources in the organization and therefore organization should promote Human relations through promoting communication amongst workers, resolve conflicts and encourage supervisor-employee relations which are concepts derived for study.

1.1.3 Conceptual background

The Human relations theory suggests that maintaining healthy employee relations in an organization is a pre-requisite for organizational success. This therefore presupposes that Human relations has a positive relationship with organization and individual performance. This study investigates the relationship between employee relations as an independent variable and academic staff performance as a dependent variable.

Employee relations practices refers to the agreements, rules and regulations that regulate the behavior amongst workers and between workers and their supervisors (Rowley, 2001). Duah, Danso, Samwel, and Study (2015) define Employee relations practices as situations in which employees work under the direction and authority of the employer and in return receives wage for his effort.

According to Rowley (2001), employee relations practices within the organization are required for boosting their productivity and encourage employee satisfaction. The study by Chand and Katou (2007) emphasized that organizations should deal with all matters of employee conflict by introducing measures to avoid and resolve issues concerning individuals and managers which might negatively influence the work. Workplace conflicts amongst workers have been found to have a negative influence on performance. Demann, Stein, Levitt and Shelton (2008) emphasizes the need by managers to clarify on the working conditions and terms for each individual worker

or teams so as to reduce on role conflicts. The study also established that work place disputes cause strikes that may hamper performance.

Besides, several studies have established a positive relationship between employee communication and performance of organizations. Korte (2007) identifies that employee relation depends upon healthy and safe work environment, cent percent involvement and commitment of all employees, incentives for employee motivation, and above all effective communication system in the organization. Healthy employee relations led to more efficient, motivated and productive employees which further lead to increase in production level.

In recent times, while most workers are on job, they do not produce more simply because of the un-healthy relationship they have with their fellow colleagues and employers. A recent study conducted by Ackers (2014) revealed that employees do not put up their best performances at workplaces when they are un-happy with management, government, or even their fellow colleagues. Bad employee-employer relationship results in strike actions and lockouts. All these actions taken by employees to display their grievances only do the organization harm than good as productivity was be reduced drastically.

1.1.4 Contextual background

The study context was academic staff performance of public universities in Uganda with a specific consideration of Gulu University as a unit of analysis. Gulu University is a public university located in Gulu town in Northern Uganda. It registers a gradual increase in enrollment with the current enrollment ranging between 4000-5000 students in the year 2019-2020 including international students. Gulu University is one of the nine public universities established by Act 7 of Parliament with 56 running academic programs.

However, Gulu University academic staff performance is gradually declining with evidence on Daily Monitor (11 27 2019) indicating that Gulu University had been hit by shortage of both teaching and non-teaching staff. Gulu University has 380 academic staff across all departments however, the Performance report (2019) indicates that over 60% of the staff do not often submit results on-time as expected. In addition, the attendance of academic staff was gradually falling with only 40% of the academic staff completing their syllabuses before start of semester exams. The university has also registered an increasing number of staff complains with demonstrations also on rise over years.

It is therefore against this background that this study sought to establish the nature of employee relations at the university and its resultant effect on the academic staff performance of the overall university. Several studies conducted in other organizations have established a positive effect of Employee relations practices on academic staff performance however very limited studies have been conducted in public universities especially in the Ugandan context particularly no one in Gulu University hence justifying the need for this study,

1.2 Statement of the problem

Employee relations are known to play significant roles in fostering academic staff performance. Gulu University is perceived as successful public university within Uganda (Duah, Danso, Samwel, and Study, 2015). However, the university is being characterized by increased cases of staff complains, labor turnover and staff demonstrations over years (Auditor General's Report, 2019). As it was reported in the University Performance report (2019) that over 700 members of both teaching and non-teaching staff went on strike accusing government for failing to implement the labor practices such as mandatory salary review policy agreed with the worker's union representatives, lack of academic staff communications channels within the University. The

University Performance Report (2019) further indicates that over 60% of the staff do not often submit results on-time as expected. In addition, the attendance of academic staff was gradually falling with only 40% of the academic staff completing their syllabuses before start of semester exams. The nature of work in the University is quite challenging characterized by poor communication, staff conflicts and limited staff participation in decision making which is perceived to have resulted into frustration amongst the staff and yet management and government seem not to be much interested in the ongoing circumstances (Atwebembeire et al., 2018). On this ground, this study sought to investigate how employee relations practices may have resultant effect on the performance of academic staff of Gulu University.

1.3 Objective of the study

The main objective of the study was to examine the effect of Employee relations practices on academic staff performance of public Universities in Uganda with specific focus on Gulu University.

1.4 Specific objectives

1. To examine the effect of employee communications on the academic staff performance of Gulu University.
2. To investigate the effect of conflict resolution on the academic staff performance of Gulu University
3. To examine the effect of employee empowerment on the academic staff performance of Gulu University.

1.5 Research hypothesis

H1: Employee communications does not significantly affect the academic staff performance of Gulu University.

H2: Conflict resolution does not significantly affect the academic staff performance of Gulu University.

H3: Employee empowerment does not significantly affect the academic staff performance of Gulu University.

1.6 Significance of the study

This study sought to bring out clear understanding of the contribution of employee relations to enhancing academic staff performance of public universities in Uganda. The study provided how various dimensions of employee relations practices can be applied in the public universities to increase productivity.

The study provided recommendations to the government and management on areas of improvement in the public universities that must be taken into consideration. There is a lot lacking on improving connectivity amongst employees with employees not allowed to participate in decision making, no free communication and staff conflicts on arise. This study therefore established what government needs to improve.

The findings of study enabled employees in public universities to understand the relevance of sharing ideas and managing conflicts in a bid to enhance their academic staff performance. This study enlightened on the contribution of employee relations.

1.7 Scope of the Study

1.7.1 Content Scope

The study sought to investigate the effect of employee relations practices on academic staff performance of Public universities in Uganda. It sought to investigate the effect of three dimensions of Employee relations practices which include; Employee communication, Conflict resolution and Employee empowerment as independent variables and academic staff performance of Public universities as a dependent variable

1.7.2 Geographical Scope

The study was carried out in Gulu University. It is located 5 kilometers by road, North-East of Gulu town in Gulu district of Northern part of Uganda which is approximately 339 kilometers by road North of Kampala capital city. The University was chosen for investigation because it was one of the oldest public university in Uganda established in 2002 with a total number of 441 employees however its academic staff performance is still below standard which requires a study.

1.7.3 Time Frame

The study considered reviewing literature related to period of 2000 to 2019. The period was considered because Public universities started facing high level of competition which required adoption of labor practices to enhance academic staff performance and therefore it saw a rapid increase in implementation of employee relations in public universities.

1.8 Organization of the study

The project was organized around following chapters;

Chapter one gives an introduction to the research work. This chapter therefore consists of the background of the study and, objectives, research questions, significance of the study, scope of the study, and limitations encountered by the researcher.

Chapter Two consists of the theoretical and conceptual issues, relevant extant literature on the subject and conceptual classifications.

Chapter three gives details of the qualitative analysis of the phenomenon under study, analysis of subject and assessment of the subject.

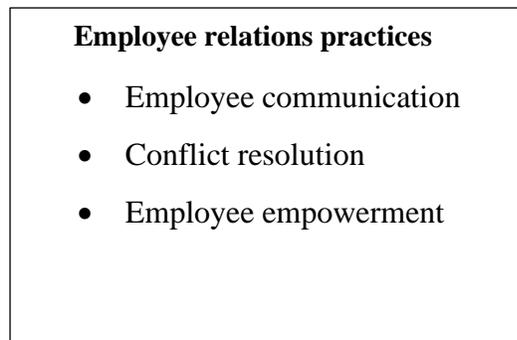
Chapter Four gives presentation of findings, data analysis and interpretations

Chapter Five consists of summary of findings, conclusions, recommendations and area of further study

1.9 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework in Figure 1 below hypothesized that there was a relationship between employee relations practices and the academic staff performance of Public Universities.

Independent Variable



Dependent variable

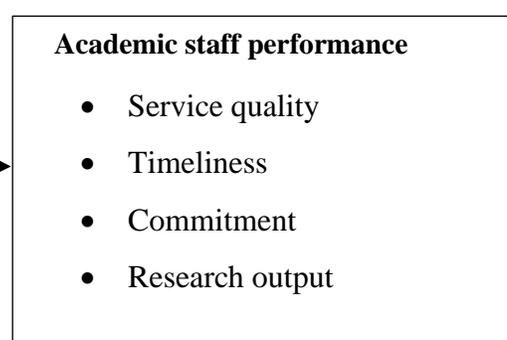


Figure 1: The conceptual framework showing the effect of Employee relations practices on the academic staff performance

Source: Ngari (2013) and modified by the researcher (2020)

Figure 1 illustrates the hypothesized relationship that existed between study variables. The underlying assumption of the framework was that Employee relations practices contributes to academic staff performance. Employee relations was conceptualized into three dimensions which include; Employee communication, Conflict resolution and Employee empowerment. In addition, Academic staff performance was a dependent variable in the study and it was conceptualized basing on non-financial performance dimensions of efficiency, effectiveness and service deliver.

1.10 Definition of terms

Employee relations practices; refers to the agreements, rules and regulations that regulate the behavior amongst workers and between workers and their supervisors (Rowley, 2001). Duah, Danso, Samwel, and Study (2015) also define employee relations practices as situations in which employees work under the direction and authority of the employer and in return receives wage for his effort.

Employee communication; it refers to a two-way process of sending and receiving messages from one employee (the sender) to another (the receiver). Communication in an organization may involve upward or downward communication.

Conflict resolution; According to Thakore (2013) conflict resolution refers to process of driving self-awareness about conflict, conflict communication and establishing conflict management environment for individuals with opposing needs, ideas, goals, beliefs and values .

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

Literature in this chapter reviewed necessary information pertaining to the subject area of this study. This chapter was divided into 3 sections; the first section discussed the theoretical framework, the second section discussed effect of Employee relations practices on academic staff performance and lastly the literature gap.

2.1 Theoretical review

2.1.1 The human relations approach

This study manipulated the effect of employee's relations on academic staff performance. It was believed that employee's relations could stimulate more and better work, through boosting morale and team spirit (Hassard, 2012). This study reviewed various theories to understand the contribution of Employee relations practices on enhancing the academic staff performance. The theories reviewed include; Human relations theory,

The human relations theory was put forward by George Elton Mayo in 1920s during his series of studies at the Hawthorne Works of the Western Electric Company in Chicago that aimed at discovering organization's motivation when workers know that they are being watched when carrying out their activities (Hart, 2012). The theory urged that workers level of motivation was not largely influenced by working conditions but rather employee's perception of social feeling and appropriate management styles. Furthermore, the theory suggests that organizations that put focus on workers informal group, build favorable social environment for employees and create the friendless and association amongst co-workers would register an increase in performance.

In addition, the theory also established that flexible interactions between supervisors and employees also helps to boost worker's productivity. Managers are urged to provide job security, recognition which are assumed to induce commitment amongst workers to achieve organizational goals. The theory points out the need to bring together the individual and the social relations into focus at a time when organizations does not recognize worker's contribution towards achieving the goals of the organization (Tirintetaake, 2017). The theory therefore is found to be relevant to this study because it promotes the idea that employee is vital resource in the organization and therefore organization should promote Human relations through promoting communication amongst workers, resolve conflicts and encourage supervisor-employee relations which are concepts derived for study.

2.1.2 The Equity theory

The theory was developed by J. Stacy Adam(Pritchard, 1969). It points out an individual's subjective judgment about the fairness of the rewards received relative to their effort, experience, and education, in comparison with the rewards of others who fall under the same group. The theory identifies that if the relations are unequal then inequality was perceived and was reduce the morale of the affected employees. Therefore, organizations should extend fair and equitable rewards to employees working in the same team and under same working conditions.

2.2 Review of related literature

The study reviewed various literature from various scholars in line with the objectives of the current study that sought to establish the effect of employee relations dimensions on performance of organizations.

2.2.1 The effect of employee communication on academic staff performance

Employees are one of the major resources for most of the Universities, both private and public universities just like any other organization. Employees give their best to increase the performance of the organization and therefore its manager's obligation to let them know how they are performing. This implies that there should be clear channels of communication in an organization both vertical and horizontal communication channels. This allows free flow of messages and feedback about the performance and also supports reporting and conflict resolutions in an organization (Karanges et al., 2014).

Kotler and Amstrong (2012) proposes that at the center of any successful performance of an organization, employee relationship should include free flow of communication and this is the important aspect that keeps employees and managers informed about general issues affecting organizations performance. Communication is a two-way process of sending and receiving messages from the sender to the receiver. Communication in an organization may involve upward or downward communication.

According to Duah et al. (2015) communication plays a supreme importance in an organization which should be acknowledged by managers and employees. Organizations should put in place adequate mechanisms to stimulate the exchange of information, suggestions, feelings and opinions between management and employees. This is supported by Neves and Eisenberger (2012) who contend that communication plays significant roles in an organization among which include; it ensures that employee behavior is consistent with the goals of the organization, it plays innovation purposes whereby employees exchange new ideas that seeks to change the way that things are done and communication also plays information role in which employees share information with managers.

Open communication between managers and employees has been found to be more likely to strengthen employee-manager relations which in return enhances organizational performance (Tsai, 2011). This is supported by Bartels et al. (2007) who also identified that open communication within the organization enables employees to cope up with changes that take place in the organization thereby increasing the performance of both individual employees and organizational performance.

An empirical study by Ngari (2016) also found out that there is a positive relationship between different aspects of effective communication and performance. They established that organizations that increase their effort to achieve high frequency, accuracy and openness in their communication mechanisms are most likely to register an increase in performance. Evidence from Den Hartog et al. (2013) also identified that communication should be clear and often within the organization on the changes that take place within the organization so that employees are well versed with what they are expected to do in order to cope up with the changes. It was established that clear communication helps to distress employees and also motivates them to perform well their activities.

Jacobs et al. (2016) suggested that a health communication within the organization positively affects the performance of the organization. The study identified that employees who work under conditions of healthy communication are more focused, share ideas and are motivated to work in teams which prevents constant in fights. Communication builds warm relationships amongst employees and every employee is informed of his roles and responsibilities which raises the expected level of performance. Johlke and Duhan (2000) support that transparency in communication, employee empowerment, conflict resolution led to strong employee relations that in return influence the organization performance

2.2.2 The effect of conflict resolution on academic staff performance

Several studies have pointed out the contribution of conflict resolution as employee relations dimension on the performance of organizations and these studies include; (Kankanhalli, Tan, & Kwok-Kee, 2006; Thakore, 2013; Aureli & Fraser, 2019; De Dreu & Weingart, 2003)

Conflict refers to contest between individuals opposing needs, ideas, goals, beliefs and values and has been identified to be inevitable amongst teams, groups and an individual (Thakore, 2013). Conflicts have a negative effect on performance however according to the study by Kankanhalli, Tan, and Kwok-Kee (2006) organizations can beneficially resolve and it's an integral part of high organization performance. Conflict management has a positive effect on performance and should be considered an important aspect of employee relations management. According to Thakore (2013) conflict management entails self-awareness about conflict, conflict communication, skills related to conflict resolution and establishing conflict management environment.

Aureli and Fraser (2019) noted that employee conflicts entail costs in the organizations and they form a regular part of lives of individual and groups of employees in the organization. His study findings indicated that organization that put in place resolution, reconciliation and post conflict interactions amongst employees would reduce on the negative effect of conflicts such as stress and costs in the organization thereby registering improved performance. This receives support from an empirical study by De Dreu and Weingart (2003) who investigated Task versus relationship conflict and found out that task conflict had a weak negative relationship with team performance. Today most organizations long term success has been found to be dependent upon organizations ability to manage proper relationships among its human resource, encouraging them to be creative and innovative (Duah & Danso, 2017). Organizations are encouraged to build strong cordial relationships amongst employees so as to enable them work towards common organization goal.

This is due to the fact that the expectancy theory suggests that organization growth is linked to employee expectations and satisfaction of employees' demands (Aguinis & Kraiger, 2009). In light of the above Prieto-Remón et al. (2015) found out that employee relationship management entails relationships between individuals and collective relationships arising from employment. It includes aspects of worker participations, conflict resolution, and workers' communications and workers' participation.

The above study is also supported by Johlke and Duhan (2000) who also identified that factors that result into good employee relations include; employee empowerment, conflict management, transparency communication and collective bargain. In this study it was found out that conflict management contributed highly and directly to organization performance. This is also supported by Jehn et al. (2008) who identified that dispute resolution has a positive relationship with employee performance. The study also identified that strikes mostly affect the productivity of the organization and would be costly for the organizations.

2.2.3 The effect of employee empowerment on the academic staff performance

The effect of employee empowerment has been established by various scholars in the previous studies to be crucial in the enhancement of organization's performance. However, the extent of employee empowerment is a debate with some arguing that there is a weak effect and others identifying a very strong effect. Therefore, this study seeks to establish the effect of employee empowerment on academic staff performance at the context of Ugandan public universities.

Ackers (2014) urges that given the intense competition in the industries today, there is a need for management to draw commitment from employees by empowering them to participate in decision making. In their study the findings indicated that employee empowerment would encourage team

work which builds on strong employee relations and thereby improving organization's performance. This is also supported by an empirical study by Duah et al. (2015) who also established that employee empowerment builds a strong cordial relationship to the fullest advantage in improving organizational effectiveness and taking the organization to its expected destination.

Samwel (2018) contends employee relations as one of the key elements of organizational performance. In his study that sought to establish the effect of employee relations on employee performance carried out in Tanzania, it was found out that employee empowerment had a positive significant effect on employee performance. The study further established that the application of unfair labor practices would jeopardize the performance of the organization and therefore employee empowerment would be a better measure on achieving cordial relationships amongst employees.

Fernandez and Moldogaziev (2013) also established a significant effect of employee empowerment on performance and contended that employees should be involved directly into decision making that go beyond their immediate tasks. The study also suggested that employees should be given opportunities to control their work situations in a manner that benefits the overall organization. This is supported by Manzoor (2011) who also established that employee empowerment enables employees to share goals and it was established that employee empowerment has a positive relationship with employee acceptance and commitment which in return leads to favorable performance.

A study by Ukil (2016) that sought to establish employee motivation through empowerment and its impact on employee performance identified that employee empowerment leads to employee

satisfaction with existing organization practices that have direct effect on overall performance. This is also in line with the findings of Ngari (2016) which revealed a significant effect of employee empowerment and employee communication on the organizational performance in private universities in Kenya.

2.3 Literature gap

From the reviewed literature, the study cited a conceptual gap where studies have been conducted to establish the effect of employee relations practices on organization performance of University (Ngari, 2016; Thakore, 2013) without any that necessarily focuses on the effect of employee relations on academic staff performance which this study sought to address.

The study also cited contextual gap where studies have been conducted in different countries and institutions with very few studies conducted in the public universities and no study has been conducted to establish the effect of employee relations practices on academic staff performance of Gulu University. This study therefore sought to address this contextual gap by considering Gulu University as a main area of the study.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the methodology that was adopted in the study. The specific issues addressed in this chapter include the research design, study population, sample size and selection, sampling techniques and procedure, data collection instruments and procedures, measurements of research variables, discussion on validity and reliability as well as ethical considerations in the study.

3.1 Research design

This study adopted a case study design. This involved an in-depth investigation into Gulu University to ascertain academic staff performance as influenced by employee relations practices chosen in this study which include employee communication, conflict resolution and employee participation as supported by (Tierney, 2002). Furthermore, the study followed both quantitative and qualitative approaches as a triangulation approach to eliminate some inconsistencies that arise as a result of adopting one approach. The quantitative approach was descriptive in nature to provide clear description of the regressive effect of employee relation practices on the academic staff performance as suggested by (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009). The qualitative approach in this study involved gathering of detailed respondents' opinions, suggestions and explanations through interviews from which detailed explanations was provided to understand the relationships between variables basing on the experiences and opinions of the respondents. This approach was helpful in supplementing the quantitative findings as indicated by Coy (2019)

3.2 Study population

This study focused on Gulu University as a unit of analysis. Gulu University is one of the public universities in Uganda with a target population of 700 employees both teaching and non-teaching

staff. However, this study focused on teaching staff who constituted a study population of 380 employees.

3.3 Sample size

A sample size of 160 employees from various departments of Gulu University was drawn from a study population of 380 members of the teaching staff with the help of Krejcie and Morgan (1970) statistical table. A sample of 10 key members of the staff who included Heads of Departments, Deans and the Director of Human Resource. The sample size breakdown is indicated in the table as per departments of Gulu University head office.

Table 1: Population and sample size distribution

Department	Population	Sample	Sampling techniques
Management and business	102	45	Simple random
Social sciences and administration	106	45	Simple random
Science and medicines	88	35	Simple random
Engineering	84	35	Simple random
Total	380	160	

Source: Gulu University Employee Database (2019)

3.4 Sampling Techniques and procedure

The study used stratified sampling to choose the four departments from which the sample was drawn and afterwards used simple random sampling. This technique involved giving equal chance to all members in the population to take part in the study through random selection. Simple random

sampling was used to arrive to the final sample size of 160 from the departments as indicated in Table 1 above. Purposive sampling was used to select key members of staff who were involved in the interviews since they were considered to be much informed on issues related to employee relations practices at the University.

3.5 Data sources

Both primary and secondary data was gathered to address the objectives of the study. The study collected primary data from respondents through questionnaires and interviews. Primary data sources were considered appropriate for this study as it's the first-hand information required to obtain evidence to test the study hypothesis. Secondary data was also collected from the reports, registers to support the primary evidence.

3.6 Data collection instrument

The main data collection instruments were structured survey questionnaires and interview guide.

3.6.1 Self-administered questionnaire

This study adopted a questionnaire method of data collection. A questionnaire method had been widely used by previous scholars and considered to be appropriate for the study (Gado, 2013). This method was effective, affordable, eliminated biases and gave respondents time to fill them at their convenience (Gado, 2013). This study used structured questionnaires consisting of closed ended questions capturing all study objectives. It consisted of five main sections; the first section addressed issues of company profile and respondent's bio-data, section two captured employee communication, section three addressed conflict resolution, section four comprised of employee empowerment and lastly section five addressed academic staff performance.

3.6.2 Interview guide

Interviews were used in this study. Interview is an appropriate method of collecting detailed primary data to support evidence from questionnaires (Saunders & Tosey, 2013). Interviews were conducted face-to-face between the researcher and the respondent. An interview guide was used to enable the researcher probe and collect in-depth data as required per the study.

3.7 Validity and Reliability of the instruments

3.7.1 Reliability of instruments

To ensure reliability of the research instrument, the questionnaire was pre-tested on few respondents within Kyambogo University before actual collection of data commences. This helped to identify irregularities in the variables (Sekaran & Bougie, 2010). In addition, Cronbach's alpha coefficient was computed to test for the internal consistency of the study variables whereby all variables with Cronbach's alpha coefficient of above 0.7 were considered reliable for data collection (Veal, 1997).

Table 2: Reliability tests

Variable	N of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Employee communication	4	.681
Conflict resolution	4	0.775
Employee empowerment	4	0.716
Academic staff performance	4	0.782

Source: Primary data

From the table it can be observed that all the items had a Cronbach's alpha above 0.7 except for employee communication that was 0.681 but was also near 0.7. This implied that the instrument was reliable.

3.7.2 Validity of instruments

Validity refers to measure of degree of accuracy and truth of the research results (Kurian, 2014). To test for face validity, questionnaire was pre-tested and also advice was be sought from supervisors so as to eliminate biased items. Construct validity was done with the help of supervisors to determine whether right constructs have been captured in the study. Content validity was be also calculated using content validity index to ensure that all variables have captured the required content where the content validity index of 0.7 was considered appropriate for the study (Djamba & Neuman, 2002). The formula is provided below

$$\text{Content Validity Index} = \frac{\text{Number of items declared Valid (16)}}{\text{Total number of items (22)}}$$

$$\text{CVI} = 0.73$$

The content validity index was above 0.7 indicating that the study questionnaire was valid and relevant for the study as supported by (Djamba & Neuman, 2002).

3.8 Procedures of data collection

The researcher sought approval from Graduate School of Kyambogo University before going for data collection as required in ethical guidelines. This helped to build confidence of the respondent throughout the data collection process. Each questionnaire was had a brief introduction of the researcher. Furthermore, the respondents were assured of confidentiality of their information. Before the questionnaires were supplied, the researcher sought for advise from experts to check

the content validity of the questions and their comprehensibility. Interviews were conducted with the key persons of Gulu University who were heads of departments. This was conducted face to face at the organization's premises.

3.9 Data Analysis

Data was analyzed using both qualitative and quantitative analysis techniques. Data collected with questionnaires was analyzed using quantitative analysis technique. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze bio-data of the respondents. Regression analysis was used to analyze the effect of independent variables on the academic staff performance so as to address the objectives of the study.

Data collected with the use of interviews was categorized according to emerging variables from each question in the interview guide. Qualitative analysis of this data was done using content analysis to determine the adequacy of the information, credibility, usefulness and consistency as supported by (Mugenda, 2008).

3.10 Measurement of variables

The study variables were measured using constructs adapted from existing studies that used similar constructs and modified to match the context of Uganda.

3.10.1 Independent variable

Employee relations practices represented the independent variable for this study. The measurable constructs for Employee relations practices in this study were; employee communication conflict resolution and employee empowerment.

Employee communication: This was measured in two dimensions; bottom-up communication and horizontal communication basing on respondent's perception on how often university shared letters, emails, notices and circulars with academic staff.

Conflict resolution: This was conceptualized into two dimensions; organizational conflict resolution and personal conflict resolution which were measured basing on employee's perception of peace at work, stress levels and sharing amongst employees.

Employee empowerment: In this study this was conceptualized basing on two dimensions; involvement in decision making and delegation which were measured basing on how often academic staff were involved in decision making, chairing meetings and job rotation

3.10.2 Dependent variable

Academic staff performance in this study was operationalized as non-financial oriented (Ittner, Larcker, & Randall, 2013). The academic staff performance was therefore measured in terms of service quality, timeliness, commitment and research output.

3.11 Ethical Considerations

In consideration of research ethical principles, the researcher obtained an introductory letter from graduate school of Kyambogo university seeking acceptance to carry out research Gulu University head office. The researcher ensured confidentiality and protection of the respondents' rights. The research also obtained letter of confirmation from Gulu University giving permission to collect data from the employees. The respondents were informed about the reason and purpose of the research.

3.12 Limitations

First, the study used sampling technique to choose the sample of the study which in most cases was subjected to some sampling errors. This may have had some minor effects on the final findings however the study tried as much as possible to avoid the sampling error by using appropriate and recommended procedures of sample selection such as Krejcie and Morgan (1970) statistical table.

Secondly, the study faced some challenges during data collections where some employees were not willing to cooperate and provide data on time. However, the study tried to minimize this by ensuring timely collection of data and also explained clearly to the respondents the reasons as to why the research was being conducted and how beneficial the study was towards improvement of their academic staff performance.

Furthermore, the study was based on only three variables for the study which included employee communication, conflict resolution and employee empowerment. This meant that other employee relations practices were left out which future studies should focus.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA ANALYSIS, PRESENTATION, INTERPRETATION OF RESULTS

4.0 Introduction

This chapter presents, interprets and analyses the findings from the study. It presents the response rate, sample characteristics, descriptive statistics. Correlation analysis is also presented to establish the relationships between the variables of the study.

4.1 Response rate

In regards to the sample of 160 teaching staff of Gulu University, questionnaires were supplied and only 132 questionnaires were returned fully answered and fit for the analysis. This therefore represented a response rate of 82.5%. This response rate was high and its outcome is deemed representative of the population as per Baruch and Holtom (2008).

4.2 Background information

The study gathered background data of the sample so as to establish the sample characteristics. Respondents were asked to indicate their gender, age group, education and length of service. The data collected is summarized in Table 3 below:

Table 3: Sample characteristics

Gender	Frequency	Percent
Male	76	57.6
Female	56	42.4
Total	132	100.0

Age bracket	Frequency	Percent
25-36 years	29	22.0
36-45 years	65	49.2
46-55 years	29	22.0
above 55 years	9	6.8
Total	132	100.0

Education level	Frequency	Percent
Bachelor's	34	25.8
Master's	64	48.5
PhD	34	25.8
Total	132	100.0

Position held	Frequency	Percent
Teaching Assistant	15	11.4
Assistant Lecturer	36	27.3
Lecturer	50	37.9
Senior Lecturer	24	18.2
Others	7	5.3
Total	132	100.0

Length of service	Frequency	Percent
1-4 years	40	30.3
5-9 years	42	31.8
10 years and above	50	37.9
Total	132	100.0

Source: Primary data

The study obtained data from a total of 132 staff members of the sample. The gender distribution indicated that majority of the respondents were male (57.6%) and female were only 42.4% of the sample. This implies that both genders were involved in the study. In regards to their age brackets, majority of the respondents who participated in the study were between 36-45 years (49.2%) while only 6.8% were above 55 years.

In regards to the level of education, 25.8% of the respondents were Bachelor's holders and 48.5% were Master's holders who constituted the majority. Similarly, 25.8% of the respondents were PhD holders. This implied that the respondents were qualified enough to interpret and respond to the questionnaire.

In addition, it was revealed that teaching assistants who responded to the questionnaire were 11.4%, assistant lecturers were 27.3% of the sample and lecturers were 37.9%. Similarly, senior lecturers were 18.2% and other staff from especially human resource management department were only 5.3%.

The study revealed that 30.3% of the respondents had served the university for a period between 1-4 years. 31.8% had served for a period between 5-9 years while 37.9% had served for 10 years

or more. This implied that the respondents were knowledgeable of the nature of the relationships within the departments and university.

4.3 Descriptive statistics for employee relations practices and academic staff performance

The study measured the items of each variable on a five-point Likert scale where 1 was for strongly disagree, 2 for disagree, 3 for neutral, 4 for agree and 5 meant strongly agree. The mean and the standard deviation (SD) were used to analyze respondents’ perception of the study variables as seen below.

4.3.1 Descriptive findings for employee communication at Gulu University

Respondents were required to indicate the extent to which they perceived employee communication at the university. They were required to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement as per the Likert scale of 1-5 to the items that were adopted to measure employee communication at Gulu University. The findings are presented in Table 4 below.

Table 4: Descriptive statistics on employee communication

Items	Mean	Std. Deviation
University has effective communication channels in place	3.86	.917
The university communicates new changes to all employees through letters	3.24	1.099
Staff members often receive notices from top management	4.01	.546
Staff members are often supplied with university circulars	3.86	.898
Overall mean	3.74	0.865

Source: Primary data

As indicated in Table 4 above, there was a notable variation on employees' perception of communication within the university with majority of them agreeing that staff members often receive notices from top management (Mean =4.01, SD=.546). Respondents on average of 3.86 indicated that the university has effective communication channels in place. Respondents who perceived the university to be communicating new challenges to all employees registered a mean score of 3.24 and Standard deviation of 1.099. Lastly, respondents' perception of whether staff members are often supplied with university circulars registered a mean score of 3.86 and standard deviation of .898.

In an interview with the Dean of Faculty of Agriculture and the Environment regarding his perception of the communication effectiveness in the University had this to say;

“The communication in this university is fairly effective and it varies basing on the faculties because I can not say that the way we communicate within our faculty is the way it is done in other faculties. For us in this faculty we encourage sharing of ideas and we have channels in place which include email, texts and notices. Any thing or any idea that we develop as a faculty is communicated to all academic staff though some of these channels are slow. We also once in a while supply circulars to the academic staff especially towards the closure of each academic year.”

4.3.2 Descriptive findings for conflict resolution at Gulu University

Respondents were required to indicate the extent to which they perceived conflict resolution at the university. They were required to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement to the items that were adopted to measure conflict resolution amongst employees at Gulu University. The findings are presented in Table 5 below.

Table 5: Descriptive statistics on conflict resolution

Items	Mean	Std. Deviation
University has conflict management strategies in place	3.67	.824
We often sit as a department to solve conflicts between staff	3.67	.835
The University often registers cases of staff conflict	3.57	.934
The university encourages forgiveness amongst staff and reconciliation	3.64	.935
Overall mean	3.637	0.882

Source: Primary data

The study established that respondents perceived conflict resolution to be relatively high with in the university. University was identified to have conflict management strategies in place represented by a mean score of 3.67 and standard deviation of 8.24. Respondents also seemed to agree that they often sit as a department to solve conflicts between them (Mean =3.67, SD =8.35). The respondents on average of 3.57 indicated that the university often registers cases of staff conflict. Lastly a mean score of 3.64 was registered on whether the university encourages forgiveness amongst staff.

4.3.3 Descriptive findings for employee empowerment at Gulu University

Respondents were required to indicate the extent to which they perceived employee empowerment at the university. They were required to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement to the items that were adopted to measure employee empowerment at Gulu University. The findings are presented in Table 6 below.

Table 6: Descriptive statistics on employee empowerment

Items	Mean	Std. Deviation
There is collective decision making in Gulu university between staff and management	3.21	1.063
The performance of Gulu university is attributed to employee empowerment	3.36	1.100
I am happy with my duties and roles in this university	3.98	.688
The university often recognizes my participation in decision making	3.14	.729
Overall mean	3.44	0.895

Source: Primary data

There was a notable variation on how the respondents perceived the level of employee empowerment especially in line with items that were adopted to measure employee empowerment at the university. Respondents agreed that they were happy with their duties and roles registering a mean score of 3.98 which was above the overall mean of 3.44. Respondents indicated that collective decision making was low and university has low recognition of employee's participation in decision making with mean scores of 3.21 and 3.14 which were below the overall mean score of 3.44

4.3.4 Descriptive findings for academic staff performance at Gulu University

Respondents were required to indicate the extent to which they perceived academic staff performance at the university. They were required to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement to the items that were adopted by the study to measure employee empowerment at Gulu University. The findings are presented in Table 7 below.

Table 7: Descriptive statistics on conflict resolution

Items	Mean	Std. Deviation
Staff commitment is high in this University	3.33	.904
Staff service delivery has improved over years because of staff employee relations	3.34	.846
Staff output levels have improved over the years	3.48	.860
Research publications have increased over years	3.75	.868
Overall mean	3.475	0.8695

Source: Primary data

The results presented in the table indicate that respondents perceived staff commitment to be low and also indicated that staff service delivery has not improved much over years with both registering mean scores below overall mean of 3.475 (Means =3.33 and 3.34 respectively). However, respondents perceived staff output levels to have improved over years (Mean =3.48). Lastly, they also indicated that research publications have increase over years represented by a mean of 3.75 which is above overall mean of 3.475.

4.4 Relationship between study variables

In this section the study's interest was to establish the relationship between independent variables and dependent variable.

Table 8: Correlation results of study variables

		<i>Correlations</i>			
Variables		1	2	3	4
Employee communication (1)	Pearson				
	Correlation	1			
	Sig. (2-tailed)				
Conflict resolution (2)	Pearson				
	Correlation	.204*	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.019			
Employee empowerment (3)	Pearson				
	Correlation	.508**	.251**	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.004		
Academic staff performance (4)	Pearson				
	Correlation	.488**	.441**	.519**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: Primary data

According to the findings in Table 8 above, employee communication has a significant moderate and positive relationship with academic staff performance ($r = 0.488$, $P < 0.01$). This implies that employees who feel there is a good communication within the university are also observed to report higher levels of performance. It was also found out that there is a moderate positive relationship between conflict resolution and academic staff performance ($r = 0.441$ and $p < 0.01$). This implies that employees whose conflicts are resolved are also observed to report high levels of performance. Finally, results also indicate that there is a moderate positive and significant relationship between employee empowerment and academic staff performance. This implies that

employees who feel empowered within the university are also observed to report high levels of performance.

4.5 Regression analysis

In order to address the study's specific objectives, the study conducted a regression analysis so as to determine the effect of employee relations practices on academic staff performance. The results are presented below.

4.5.1 The effect of employee communication on academic staff performance

The study conducted a regression analysis to establish the effect of employee communication on academic staff performance as seen in Table below.

Table 9: Regression results on the effect of employee communication on academic staff performance

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.488 ^a	.238	.232	.59266

a. Predictors: (Constant), Employee communication

ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
	Regression	14.246	1	14.246	40.559	.000 ^b
1	Residual	45.661	130	.351		
	Total	59.907	131			

a. Dependent Variable: Academic staff performance

b. Predictors: (Constant), Employee communication

Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Coefficients Beta		
	(Constant)	1.528	.310		4.935	.000
1	Employee communication	.520	.082	.488	6.369	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Academic staff performance

Source: Primary data

According to the regression results presented in Table 9 above, the ANOVA shows F-value of 40.559 and $P < 0.05$ indicating that the model was a good fit for the data and therefore employee communication significantly predicts the variations in academic staff performance. The model

summary presents Adjusted R^2 of 0.232 implying that employee communication explains up to 23.2% variations in academic staff performance and 76.8% is explained by other factors. The coefficient (Beta =0.488) shows that any effort to improve employee communication would result into 0.488 increase in academic staff performance.

The finding is also supported by the interview response of the Head of Department of Department of Medicine and Surgery who had this to say;

“One of the fundamental aspects towards improving academic staff performance is effective communication. Our university over years has been characterized by poor communication channels and strategies especially from the vertical form. Top management formulates strategies and are not clearly communicated to the academic staff performance. However, in our faculty we have prioritized proper communication to support our staff to understand what is expected of them. We share email messages and we also use notices. These communication strategies have indeed improved our academic staff performance.” (Head of Department of Department of Medicine and Surgery)

4.5.2 The effect of conflict resolution on academic staff performance

The study conducted a regression analysis to establish the effect of conflict resolution on academic staff performance as seen in Table 10 below.

Table 10: Regression results on the effect of conflict resolution on academic staff performance

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.441 ^a	.194	.188	.60929

a. Predictors: (Constant), Conflict resolution

ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
	Regression	11.647	1	11.647	31.375	.000 ^b
1	Residual	48.260	130	.371		
	Total	59.907	131			

a. Dependent Variable: Academic staff performance

b. Predictors: (Constant), Conflict resolution

Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Coefficients		
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.885	.288		6.534	.000
	Conflict resolution	.437	.078	.441	5.601	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Academic staff performance

Source: Primary data

According to the regression results presented in Table 10 above, the ANOVA shows that the model was a good fit for the data and is statistically significant (F-value of 31.375 and $P < 0.05$). This implies that conflict resolution significantly explains the variations in academic staff performance. The model summary presents Adjusted R^2 of 0.188 implying that conflict resolution explains up to 18.8% variations in academic staff performance and 81.2% is explained by other factors. The coefficient (Beta = 0.441) shows that any effort to resolve conflict amongst employees would result into 0.441 increase in academic staff performance.

The finding is also supported by the interview response from the Director of Human Resource who had this to say in reference to whether the university had conflict resolution mechanisms and whether as a result he would attribute academic staff performance to those mechanisms;

“It is our policy to ensure that all our staff work in harmony. Any grudges and conflicts of any nature that is dysfunctional to the institution are resolved on time. The academic staff are encouraged to work together and support each other instead of being involved in infights and harmful disagreements. However, there are still some cases where some staff have resigned because of conflicts which negatively affected the performance of our staff. But besides, I can truly attribute the improvement of our academic staff performance to the conflict management strategies we have in place which have either prevented the rise of conflicts or helped us to manage the outcomes of the conflicts that happened.” (Director of Human Resources)

4.5.2 The effect of employee empowerment on academic staff performance

The study conducted a regression analysis to establish the effect of employee empowerment on academic staff performance as seen in Table 11 below.

Table 11: Regression results on the effect of employee empowerment on academic staff performance

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.519 ^a	.269	.263	.58044

a. Predictors: (Constant), Employee empowerment

ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
	Regression	16.109	1	16.109	47.815	.000 ^b
1	Residual	43.798	130	.337		
	Total	59.907	131			

a. Dependent Variable: Academic staff performance

b. Predictors: (Constant), Employee empowerment

Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
	(Constant)	1.686	.263		6.401	.000
1	Employee empowerment	.522	.075	.519	6.915	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Academic staff performance

Source: Primary data

According to the regression results presented in Table 11 above, the ANOVA shows F-value of 47.815 and $P < 0.05$ indicating that the model was a good fit for the data and therefore employee empowerment significantly predicts the variations in academic staff performance. The model summary presents Adjusted R^2 of 0.263 implying that employee empowerment explains up to 26.3% variations in academic staff performance and 73.7% is explained by other factors. The coefficient (Beta = 0.519) shows that a unit increase in employee empowerment would result into 0.519 increase in academic staff performance.

The finding is supported by the qualitative finding from the interview response of the Dean of Faculty of Business and Development studies who had this to say when asked if he would attribute academic staff performance to the level of employee empowerment;

“First, I want to admit that we have been having challenges when it comes to involvement of academic staff performance into decision making over years. Because of the biggest number of part time staff, it has been so difficult to invite them to participate in the decision-making process of the faculty. However, there has been an improvement ever since I took over the office. I have worked together with the Heads of Departments to see how we can always engage all our full time and part time staff into decision making. For instance, we delegate some administrative activities to the academic staff. Because of this there is observable change in the performance of those academic staff who have been engaged into such exercises. Staff are able to produce results on time as compared to years back. Therefore, in my conclusion, staff empowerment in Gulu University especially in this Faculty has greatly contributed to the improvement of academic staff performance.” (Dean Faculty of Business and Development studies)

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, DISCUSSIONS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0 Introduction

The study sought to examine the effect of employee relations practices on academic staff performance of public Universities in Uganda with specific focus on Gulu University. In this chapter, summary, discussion, conclusions and recommendations from the study findings are presented in relation to the objectives as seen below.

5.1 Summary of the findings

The study set to investigate the effect of employee relations practices on academic staff performance of public Universities in Uganda with specific focus on Gulu University. It sought to address three specific objectives that were drawn from the employee relations practices which included; (a) to examine the effect of Employee communications on the academic staff performance of Gulu University, (b) to investigate the effect of Conflict resolution on the academic staff performance of Gulu University and (c) to examine the effect of Employee empowerment on the academic staff performance of Gulu University.

The study adopted regression analysis to address the study objectives. The analysis was done to determine the extent to which the selected employee relations practices predict the variations in academic staff performance. Therefore, from the regression results it was found out that generally employee relations practices significantly predict the variations in academic staff performance in Gulu University. This was as a result of the study establishing that employee communication, conflict resolution and employee empowerment all had a significant effect on academic staff performance. However, the study found out that employee empowerment to make decisions was a

strong predictor of academic staff performance as compared to employee communication and conflict resolution.

5.2 Discussion of findings

This section presents discussion of findings in line with the objectives that were adopted in this study as seen below.

5.2.1 The effect of employee communication on academic staff performance

The study sought to establish the effect of employee communication on academic staff performance. From the regression analysis that was conducted, it was revealed that employee communication significantly predicts the variations in academic staff performance. This implies that universities that attempt to improve on the communication between employees and management are also observed to report high levels of academic staff performance. This finding provided supporting evidence to reject the hypothesis of the study that stated that employee communication does not significantly affect academic staff performance.

The employees' general argument in many organizations is that communication is very vital for them to perform their tasks. They argue that the feedback obtained as a result of communication supports them to understand what is required of them. They also point out that communication enables them to share ideas in the organization which affects their performance positively. The finding of this study therefore provides evidence to support these arguments. Furthermore, the finding also provides supporting evidence to the human relations theory that suggests that organizations that focus on building social work environment where ideas are freely communicated amongst employees may register an increase in performance.

The finding is also in line with Kotler and Amstrong (2012) suggestion where he empathizes that for organizations to register an improvement in staff performance, there should be free flow of communication so as to keep employees and management informed about general issues affecting their organization. In the same line Duah et al. (2015) also stressed that communication plays a supreme importance in an organization. He noted that organizations should put in place adequate mechanisms to stimulate the exchange of information, suggestions, feelings and opinions between management and employees because communication significantly affects employee performance which is line with the finding of the current study.

5.2.2 The effect of conflict resolution on academic staff performance

The study found a significant effect of conflict resolution on academic staff performance. This implies that universities that improve on their ability to handle employee conflicts are also observed to register high level of academic staff performance. This finding provided evidence for the study to disapprove its hypothesis that stated that conflict resolution does not affect academic staff performance.

The finding receives support from the human relations theory that proposes that organizations should ensure security of all employees and create a social environment where employees enjoy working with one another rather than have conflicts between them. This is because resolution of conflicts is presumed to induce commitment amongst workers towards achieving common goal.

The study finding supports empirical findings of Tharkore (2013) who found out that conflict management has a significant positive effect on employee performance. In the same line Kankanhalli, Tan, and Kwok-Kee (2006) also found out that conflict management is an integral part of high organization performance. However, the finding is in contrary to the finding of De

Dreu & Weingart (2003) who found out that conflict resolution has a negative relationship with team performance.

5.2.3 The effect of employee empowerment on academic staff performance

This study established that employee empowerment was a strong predictor of academic staff performance as compared to other employee relations practices investigated in this study. Employee empowerment has a significant effect on academic staff performance and as a result the study rejected its hypothesis that stated that employee empowerment has no significant effect on academic staff performance. This implies that universities that empower their employees to participate in decision making are observed to report high level of academic staff performance.

The finding is supported by the equity theory that points out to the need for organization to ensure fairness of rewards for instance all employees should be treated and rewarded equitably as long as they participate in the same work. There is therefore a need to for employees to be rewarded by being involved in decision making. Ukil (2016) also provided supporting evidence to the finding of this study were identified that employee empowerment affects staff performance in an organization.

The finding is in line with the findings of Fernandez and Moldogaziev (2013) who established that employee empowerment significantly affects performance. They urged that when employees get involved in decision making, they get contended and develop a feeling of ownership which are key to driving their performance. Manzoor (2011) also have a supporting evidence to this study where they also established that employee empowerment enables employees to share goals and has a significant effect on employee performance.

5.3 Conclusion

The study sought to address the effect of employee relations practices on academic staff performance in Gulu University. It therefore found out that employee relations practices of communication, conflict resolution and empowerment all have a significant effect on academic staff performance. It is therefore concluded that employee relations practices play an integral part in driving academic staff performance in the university. The universities that direct their efforts towards improving the communication, resolve conflict amongst employees and empower their staff to make decisions are observed to record an improvement in academic staff performance. The study rejected its hypotheses that stated that employee communication, conflict resolution and employee empowerment do not significantly influence academic staff performance.

5.4 Recommendations

First and foremost, given that the study established a significant effect of employee communication on academic staff performance, therefore the study recommends Gulu University to strengthen the communication channels and procedures across the entire university so that the staff members can easily express their views and receive immediate feedback from management so as to drive their performance.

Secondly, it was established that conflict resolution has a significant effect on academic staff performance, this study recommends universities to develop and strengthen the conflict management strategies in the institution especially at departmental levels. These may include establishing conflict free and conflict management environment where all staff are made aware of the dangers of conflicts and capacity building on skills related to conflict management.

Lastly, as results showed that employee empowerment has a significant effect on academic staff performance, there is a need for Gulu University to continuously empower academic staff so as to

improve their performance. The staff should be called upon to contribute in the brainstorming sessions at the departments. They should also be chosen to champion the implementation of some of the decisions that they make so as to drive sense on ownership which has been found to be important in enhancing academic staff performance.

5.5 Area of further research

This study focused on only three employee relations practices however, further studies should consider other studying how other practices such as the leadership styles, trust affect academic staff performance in the organization.

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APPENDIX 1: SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

Dear respondent,

The researcher is a student pursuing a Master of Organization and Policy Management at Kyambogo University. The study is on Employee relations practices and academic staff performance of public universities in Uganda, a case of Gulu University. You have been identified as a respondent, and therefore requested to kindly spare a few minutes of your busy schedule to fill this questionnaire. This study is purely for academic purposes. Your honest answer and sincere responses are highly appreciated and shall be treated with outmost confidentiality.

SECTION A: Demographic Data

In this section you are requested to tick the option that best suits you

1) Characteristics of the respondent

a) My gender is?

1) Male 2) Female

b) My age bracket is

1) 25-35years 2) 36-45years 3) 46-55years 4) Above 55years

c) Level of education attained:

1) Bachelor's level 2) Master's level 3) PhD level 4) Others

d) What is your current position in the University?

1) Teaching Assistant
2) Assistant Lecturer
3) Lecturer

4) Senior Lecturer

5) Others (specify).....

e) How long have you been working in Gulu university?

1) 1-4 years

2) 5- 9 years

3) 10 years and above

SECTION B-E: Employee relations practices and performance of Gulu University

From statements in section B to section E, tick in the spaces provided the extent to which you agree to them using the scale below: 1-Strongly disagree (SD), 2-Disagree (D), 3-Neutral (N), and 4-Agree (A) and 5-Strongly agree (SA)

SCALE	1	2	3	4	5				
	SD	D	N	A	S A				
Section A: Employee communication				SD	D	N	A	SA	
				1	2	3	4	5	
1.	University has effective communication channels in place								
2.	There is free and fair communication procedure within the university								
3.	The university communicates new changes to all employees through letters								
4.	Staff members often receive notices from top management								

5.	Staff members are often supplied with university circulars					
6.	Staff have free access to internet for accessing university website					
Section C: Conflict resolution		SD	D	N	A	SA
		1	2	3	4	5
7.	University has conflict management strategies in place					
8.	There are staff tribunals put in place					
9.	We often sit as a department to solve conflicts between staff					
10.	The University often registers cases of staff conflict					
11.	The university encourages forgiveness amongst staff and reconciliation					
12.	There is a peaceful working atmosphere at the university					
Section D: Employee empowerment		SD	D	N	A	SA
		1	2	3	4	5
13.	There is collective decision making in Gulu university between staff and management					
14.	The performance of Gulu university is attributed to employee empowerment					
15.	The heads of department sometimes delegates duties when they are not in office					

16.	I am happy with my duties and roles in this university					
17.	The university often recognizes my participation in decision making					
18.	We often work as a team in this university					
	Section E: Academic staff performance	SD	D	N	A	SA
		1	2	3	4	5
19.	Staff commitment is high in this University					
20.	Staff delivery has improved over years because of staff employee relations practices					
21.	Staff output levels have improved over the years					
22.	I as a staff has published many articles for the last five years					
23.	Staff turnover has reduced over the years					
24.	Research publications have increased over years					

Thank You for Your Cooperation

APPENDIX 2: INTERVIEW GUIDE

What is your perception of the communication effectiveness in this university?

Kindly describe the communication channels that are available in this university and explain how staff have embraced them?

Do you think the communication channels in this organization have boosted the academic performance in this university?

Kindly describe the working atmosphere in this university in regards to the conflict resolution strategies?

How do you try to manage the conflict amongst academic staff within this university?

Would you attribute the academic staff performance in this university to be influenced by the university conflict resolution strategies?

How often do you involve your academic staff into decision making?

Does the university policy allow academic staff to chair some meetings directed towards improving performance?

Do you sometimes delegate duties to some of the academic staff?

Would you attribute the academic staff to the level of employee empowerment in this university?

How is the performance of this university in terms of enrolment, staff turnover and commitment of staff over years?

APPENDIX 3: KREJCIE AND MORGAN TABLES FOR SAMPLE SIZE DETERMINATION

<i>N</i>	<i>S</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>S</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>S</i>
10	10	220	140	1200	291
15	14	230	144	1300	297
20	19	240	148	1400	302
25	24	250	152	1500	306
30	28	260	155	1600	310
35	32	270	159	1700	313
40	36	280	162	1800	317
45	40	290	165	1900	320
50	44	300	169	2000	322
55	48	320	175	2200	327
60	52	340	181	2400	331
65	56	360	186	2600	335
70	59	380	191	2800	338
75	63	400	196	3000	341
80	66	420	201	3500	346
85	70	440	205	4000	351
90	73	460	210	4500	354
95	76	480	214	5000	357
100	80	500	217	6000	361
110	86	550	226	7000	364
120	92	600	234	8000	367
130	97	650	242	9000	368
140	103	700	248	10000	370
150	108	750	254	15000	375
160	113	800	260	20000	377
170	118	850	265	30000	379
180	123	900	269	40000	380
190	127	950	274	50000	381
200	132	1000	278	75000	382
210	136	1100	285	100000	384

Note.—*N* is population size. *S* is sample size.

Source: Krejcie & Morgan, 1970