

Work-Life Balance and Its Role on Employee Performance in Public Sector: A Study in Public Universities in Nairobi City County, Kenya

Roseline Mwikali Ngela^{1*}, Mary Kamaara²

Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology, Kenya^{1,2}

*Email: mwikalingela@gmail.com

Abstract

This study examines the impact of work-life balance on employee performance within public universities in Nairobi County, Kenya. In recent years, public universities have faced scrutiny due to declining revenues, yet limited attention has been paid to employee implications, specifically their work-life balance. Beyond compensation and rewards, maintaining a suitable work-life balance is essential for employee productivity and focus. However, the ongoing crises in public universities raise concerns about the degree to which work-life balance is supported and how this affects employee productivity. The study aimed to evaluate the adoption of critical work-life balance elements—flexible work arrangements, organizational support, employee well-being, and social support—within these universities and to analyze their relationship with employee performance. The theoretical foundation for this research rests on the resource-based view and dynamic capabilities theories. Utilizing a descriptive research design, the study focused on administrative staff across two public universities in Nairobi County. A sample of 356 administrative employees was selected through a sampling formula, and data were collected using a structured questionnaire. Descriptive and inferential statistical methods were employed to analyze the data. The findings indicate that the universities have not effectively adopted flexible work arrangements, organizational support, employee well-being initiatives, and social support, which are essential components of work-life balance. Furthermore, these components were found to influence employee performance significantly. The study concludes that the inadequate implementation of work-life balance practices has adversely impacted employee performance in these institutions. Consequently, the study recommends that public universities enhance employee work-life balance by implementing flexible work options, improving employee well-being programs, and strengthening organizational and social support structures to bolster employee performance.

Keywords: Work-life Balance, Employee Performance, Public Universities

A. INTRODUCTION

Human resources are critical in enhancing organizational effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainable performance. Modern organizations increasingly adopt strategies to strengthen human resource support to maximize productivity and gain a competitive advantage. One emerging focal point in human resource management is work-life balance, recognized by many scholars as a key driver of employee performance and organizational success (Begum et al., 2022). Promoting employee performance has become central to organizational competitiveness, as committed and focused employees are essential for meeting customer expectations and achieving organizational goals. Embracing human resource strategies that support work-life balance has enabled numerous organizations to enhance productivity. Employee performance is defined by (Diamantidis and Chatzoglou, 2018) as an employee's dedication to achieving organizational goals, while (Pawirosumarto et al., 2017) view it as the extent to which employees meet targets by leveraging their skills. (Paais and Pattiruhu, 2020) emphasize that this performance relies on employee motivation to fulfill organizational goals, which can be encouraged through work-life balance.

In the modern workforce, achieving a work-life balance—where professional and personal responsibilities are managed effectively—is increasingly important. According to (Soomro et al., 2018), work-life balance enables employees to prioritize their personal lives and job responsibilities. (Irawanto et al, 2021) state that this balance is about equal time allocation and appropriate management of both domains. The need for work-life balance has intensified with changing demographics and workplace dynamics, including dual-career households and evolving family structures. Organizations face pressure to introduce flexible work hours and wellness programs to support employee productivity and morale (Lestari et al., 2021).

* Corresponding author

In Sub-Saharan Africa, work-life balance is important as companies confront the challenge of balancing productivity demands with employees' social needs. Research by (Kumar et al., 2023) reveals that while many organizations in Africa recognize the importance of work-life balance in enhancing employee satisfaction, practical implementation is hindered by operational challenges, including workforce reductions that strain remaining employees (Oyewobi et al., 2019). Consequently, employees face increased stress, reducing their job satisfaction and performance (Akom et al., 2021). In Kenya, organizations strive to align work responsibilities with family obligations, yet studies show that most have not fully embraced work-life balance strategies, especially in the public sector (Kamwenji et al., 2022). While some organizations provide flexible schedules, overall adoption is limited, which reduces the potential benefits of a well-balanced, productive workforce.

Public universities in Kenya are pivotal in higher education and socio-economic development. As state-owned entities, these institutions significantly contribute to research and human capital development, which is crucial to Kenya's Vision 2030 agenda. Currently, with 31 chartered public universities and thousands of graduates entering the workforce annually, the quality of education—and subsequently economic development—depends heavily on the productivity of university staff (CUE, 2020). However, evidence indicates that staff morale and performance in these universities are declining due to inadequate work-life balance, which is necessary for motivating a committed workforce (Mwangi et al., 2017). Challenges such as financial constraints, high turnover, and workplace stress impact employee productivity, compromising educational quality and organizational goals.

Employees today face numerous challenges at work and personal life, including financial stress, health issues, and family obligations. These factors negatively affect their concentration, satisfaction, and productivity (Campo et al., 2021). Studies suggest that over 38% of employees report diminished performance due to family-work conflicts, which impact organizational productivity and economic growth (CIHRM, 2022). In Kenya, it is reported that over 60% of organizations do not fully implement work-life balance policies, leading to low job satisfaction and reduced performance due to long working hours (Mmakwe & Ojiabo, 2018). Like other institutions, public universities require a dedicated workforce to meet short- and long-term objectives. However, recent evidence reveals a consistent decline in staff performance, satisfaction, and retention rates within these institutions, partly attributed to inadequate work-life balance policies (KUSU, 2020; CUE, 2021). Existing studies provide mixed findings on the relationship between work-life balance and employee performance, particularly in Kenyan public universities. Therefore, this study aims to assess the impact of work-life balance on employee performance in public universities to contribute to effective human resource management practices within this unique context.

Literature Review

The literature on organizational theory provides a solid foundation for understanding how work-life balance influences employee performance and overall organizational effectiveness. The Resource-Based View (RBV) Theory, developed by (Penrose, 1959) and further refined by (Barney, 1986), underscores the role of a firm's unique resources in securing a competitive advantage. According to this theory, human capital is a valuable, non-substitutable, and inimitable resource crucial to organizational productivity. The RBV and human capital theories emphasize that investing in human resources enhances the firm's value (Loasby, 2002). Within this framework, work-life balance is seen as an essential factor in fostering employee commitment. Employees perform best when allowed the time and resources to address personal commitments, as supported by the RBV's focus on leveraging unique resources like employee skills (Liao et al., 2019). (Le et al., 2020) Furthermore, providing flexible work options and wellness initiatives can substantially boost employee dedication to organizational goals. This study, therefore, applies the RBV theory to justify flexible work arrangements and wellness programs as vital elements of work-life balance that promote productivity.

The Dynamic Capabilities Theory by (Teece et al., 1997) complements this by focusing on organizational adaptability. (Teece et al., 2016) suggest that organizational success hinges on managers' ability to reconfigure internal and external resources to sustain competitiveness. In this context, work-life balance enables employees to fully engage with organizational objectives without divided attention from personal obligations (Ma et al., 2021). Dynamic capabilities, including robust human capital and refined employee skills, are indispensable in today's dynamic work environment (Lockett & Wild, 2014). (Manroop et al., 2014) argue that supportive leave policies and family time provisions enhance employees' commitment to their jobs. This study applies the dynamic capabilities theory to evaluate the impact of leave management and family support on employee performance, illustrating how these aspects of work-life balance can foster a productive workforce.

In operational terms, work-life balance is an equilibrium where employees meet work and personal responsibilities without compromising productivity. (Tiroina and Mahdani, 2021) describe flexible work arrangements as one approach that allows employees to manage their time effectively. Research by (Weerasinghe and Jayawardana, 2020) highlights the positive impact of such flexibility on job performance, showing that when employees can adjust their work hours to accommodate personal commitments, their productivity improves. Similarly, (Darko-Asumadu et al., 2018) found that in the banking sector, flexible work arrangements promoted employee work-life balance, which led to higher productivity and, in turn, better organizational performance. Wellness programs, including work-from-home options, bolstered employee focus and dedication, thus enhancing organizational competitiveness (Mustajab et al., 2020).

Employee wellness programs also play a significant role in promoting work-life balance. (Ngozi and Chinelo, 2020) identified wellness programs as essential work-life balance drivers that significantly affect employee productivity. These programs aim to reduce work-life conflict by supporting work-related and personal goals. Furthermore, (Dua and Hieronymus, 2020) found that effective leave management systems contribute to productivity by balancing human resource availability and providing employees with the rest they need. Leave structures that allow flexibility lead to more committed and motivated employees.

Lastly, family support practices are an essential component of work-life balance. Organizations offering family-friendly policies, such as childcare support and family recreation, retain more productive employees. The study also revealed that neglecting family responsibilities when assigning tasks reduces employee effectiveness, ultimately harming organizational performance (Saina et al., 2016). This evidence collectively underscores the importance of flexible work arrangements, wellness programs, effective leave management, and family support to promote work-life balance and foster a productive and committed workforce.

B. RESEARCH METHOD

The study employed a descriptive research design to examine factors influencing work-life balance and employee performance. This approach allowed for a quantitative focus on the relationship between work-life balance practices and employee productivity. The study's target population consisted of administrative employees from two public universities in Nairobi County, totaling 3,217 individuals. Using Yamane's (1967) sampling formula to determine an optimal sample size, the calculation was as follows:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N * e^2}$$

where:

n represents the sample size,

N is the target population (3,217)

e is the error margin (0.05).

Applying the formula:

$$n = \frac{3,217}{1 + 3,217 * 0.05^2}$$
$$n = 356$$

Thus, the calculated sample size was 356 respondents proportionately distributed across the two universities using stratified random sampling. This method ensured that each university (as a stratum) was adequately represented, and within each university, respondents were selected from various administrative departments to capture a comprehensive view of work-life balance practices. Data collection was conducted through a structured questionnaire, which (Çakar and Aykol, 2021) define as a sequentially ordered set of questions designed to elicit information directly related to the research problem. The questionnaire was administered to the administrative staff across all departments in the two universities in Nairobi County, Kenya. After collection, data were scrutinized for accuracy, coded, and processed using SPSS version 27.

Descriptive statistics were used to summarize and interpret the data, including means, standard deviations, frequencies, and percentages. Additionally, regression analysis was employed to examine the relationships between the independent variables (aspects of work-life balance) and the dependent variable (employee performance). This analytical approach provided insights into the strength and nature of these relationships, facilitating a comprehensive understanding of how work-life balance influences employee productivity in the public university context.

C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study provide a comprehensive view of the current status of work-life balance practices and their impact on employee performance within public universities in Nairobi County, Kenya. The study distributed 356 questionnaires to administrative staff across two public universities. Of these, 261 completed questionnaires were returned, yielding a response rate of 73.4%. According to Kothari and Garg (2014), a response rate above 60% is considered adequate for representation and analysis, validating this study's sample as sufficiently representative of the target population.

Integration of Work-Life Balance Aspects in Public Universities

The study's first objective was to assess the degree of integration of key work-life balance aspects within public universities. Respondents agreed with statements on implementing flexible work arrangements, organizational support, employee well-being, and social support. As summarized in Table 1, the findings suggest limited adoption of work-life balance practices. Specifically, flexible work arrangements for employees had a mean score of 2.42, indicating that most respondents disagreed with the existence of flexible work policies. This result implies that flexible work arrangements were not adequately supported in the institutions as a vital aspect of work-life balance.

Organizational support, with a mean score of 2.45, also reflected low levels of agreement, suggesting that supportive policies and programs were insufficiently provided, leading to a potentially stressful work environment that could negatively impact employee performance. Employee well-being, scoring a mean of 2.72, further highlighted respondents' perceptions of inadequate health and wellness support, which may undermine employee productivity. Finally, employee social support received a mean score of 2.48, indicating limited initiatives to help employees manage social obligations, which can affect job satisfaction and morale.

These findings align with those (Adamu, 2020; Begum et al., 2022), who emphasize that poor flexibility in work arrangements and a lack of organizational support reduce employee focus and morale, adversely impacting commitment and performance. (Chebet and Awino, 2023) also, organizations risk diminished employee productivity and commitment without effective employee well-being programs.

Table 1. Extent of Integration of Work-Life Balance Aspects

Variable	Mean
Employee Flexible working Arrangements	2.42
Organizational Support	2.45
Employee Well-being	2.72
Employee Social Support	2.48

Source: research data, 2024

Employee Performance in Public Universities

The second objective was to assess employee performance levels in the public universities surveyed. Table 2 presents the mean and standard deviation scores for key performance indicators. Results indicate a general disagreement with statements on employee productivity, suggesting that respondents perceived low levels of employee performance. For instance, a mean score of 2.75 was recorded for productivity, implying that employees did not perceive significant improvements in their output over the years. Similarly, with a mean of 2.21, most respondents disagreed that employees regularly met their targets on time, indicating a lack of goal achievement. Other indicators, such as job commitment (mean 2.38) and job satisfaction (mean 2.36), also received low scores, revealing dissatisfaction and potentially low employee morale.

Table 2: Descriptive Results on Employee Performance

Statement	Mean	Std. Dev.
1. Majority of the employees in our institution have been enhancing their productivity over the years	2.75	1.20
2. Most of the employees in the institution have always met their target on time	2.21	1.24
3. The commitment of most employees to their jobs has significantly increased in the past two years	2.38	1.39
4. The level of job satisfaction among the employees has increased over the past two years	2.36	1.38

Source: research data, 2024

Relationship between Work-Life Balance and Employee Performance

The third objective of the study was to investigate the relationship between work-life balance and employee performance in public universities in Nairobi County. This relationship was analyzed using a regression model that examined specific work-life balance aspects, namely flexible working arrangements, organizational

support, employee well-being, and social support, and their impact on employee performance. The results indicated a strong positive correlation between work-life balance and employee performance, with an *R* (correlation coefficient) of 0.845. The *R*² value of 0.713 suggests that 71.3% of the variation in employee performance could be attributed to work-life balance practices, underscoring a substantial influence. The *F*-value was statistically significant at a 95% confidence level (*P*-value < 0.05), affirming the model’s validity in predicting the relationship between work-life balance and employee performance.

$$Y=0.116+0.249X_1+0.207X_2+0.213X_3+0.228X_4$$

where:

- Y: employee performance,
- X1: flexible work arrangements,
- X2: organizational support,
- X3: employee well-being,
- X4: employee social support.

The coefficients reveal that flexible work arrangements ($\beta=0.249$ \beta = 0.249\beta=0.249) had the strongest impact on employee performance, followed closely by social support ($\beta=0.228$ \beta = 0.228\beta=0.228), employee well-being ($\beta=0.213$ \beta = 0.213\beta=0.213), and organizational support ($\beta=0.207$ \beta = 0.207\beta=0.207). Each of these variables showed significant *P*-values (*P* < 0.05), indicating that all examined aspects of work-life balance had a statistically significant effect on employee performance in public universities in Nairobi County. These findings highlight the importance of implementing robust work-life balance practices, particularly flexible work arrangements, and social support mechanisms, as they are strongly associated with improved employee performance.

Table 3: Regression Model Results

R (Pearson Correlation)	R-Square	F-Value
0.845	0.713	158.711 (Sig. = 0.000<0.05)
Variable	Beta Coefficient	Sig. (P-value)
Flexible work arrangements	.249	.000
Organizational Support	.207	.000
Employee Well-being	.213	.000
Employee Social Support	.228	.000

Source: research data, 2024

CONCLUSION

The study concluded that flexible working arrangements significantly influence employee performance in public universities in Nairobi City County. Specifically, flextime, condensed work weeks, and hybrid work models enabled employees to balance work responsibilities with personal commitments. Organizational support was also found to have a meaningful impact on employee performance. Wellness programs, recreational activities, and effective stress management practices were vital for improving productivity by fostering a healthier, more supportive work environment.

Employee well-being further demonstrated a significant effect on performance, with well-structured leave policies—including compassionate, maternity, paternity, and annual leaves—contributing to enhanced productivity by allowing employees to attend to personal matters without compromising their professional roles. Finally, the study found that social support within the organization played a crucial role in fostering commitment and productivity. Key elements such as access to social resources, reduced work-life interferences, and a supportive workplace culture were integral to improving employee engagement and performance.

Recommendations

Based on these conclusions, the study makes several key recommendations for public universities in Nairobi City County. First, management is encouraged to adopt flexible working arrangements, such as condensed work weeks, to help employees focus on work while providing them time to attend to their personal lives. Flextime and hybrid work modes should also be implemented to promote work-life balance and enhance productivity. Second, organizational support through wellness initiatives should be prioritized, especially for employees experiencing mental health challenges, as targeted wellness programs can significantly boost engagement and performance. Comprehensive medical coverage and recreational programs can further support employee well-being, reducing stress and improving workforce productivity. Third, the human resource departments and policymakers should enhance leave policies to ensure employee accessibility. Maternity,

paternity, and compassionate leaves should be granted with minimal procedural requirements, and leave durations should be aligned with current recommendations to promote employee engagement and commitment. Finally, it is recommended that universities establish a social support framework to address employees' social needs, including offering emotional support during challenging times and providing resources to manage personal issues. Creating an empathetic and cooperative work environment where colleagues and managers support each other fosters a friendly workplace culture, ultimately contributing to sustained employee productivity and organizational success.

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