





## HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT PRACTICES AT THE CROSSROADS: A PERFORMANCE REVIEW OF HIGHER EDUCATIONAL ACADEMICS IN EAST AFRICAN UNIVERSITIES

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### ABSTRACT

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Right at the outset, this paper provides the reader with precise and valuable evidence alluding to the failure of the Human Resource (HR) functions in shaping work performance of academics in Higher Education (HE) context. While it is a truism that the eminence of a university cannot outmatch that of its academic staff and that the survival of any institution lies in its ability to nurture, coach, and retain its workforce, on the contrary, practice seems to suggest otherwise. Troubled by this uncertainty, the researchers were compelled to investigate why despite huge investment in HR functions; academic staff performance is still unconvincing. Why career development and training plans that are set out to retool academic staff are regarded as simplistic, unfocused, and pointless. Why HR officers in academic institutions across the region seem uncoordinated and less bothered. The available body of literature accompanied by a staked pile of statistics do not tone down to these questions, in fact, it is appropriate to claim that, HRD is one of the areas that are widely studied and least understood at the same time. These among other gaps both in theory and practice gave birth to this study. Findings of this study revealed that whereas HRD practices have a positive impact on work performance of academic staff, practice seems to distance itself from this reality. Key informants consistently maintained that while it is true that employee training, and career development significantly predict work performance, in real sense, most HR officers seem unaware of this reality.

**Contribution/Originality:** This study compelled to investigate why despite huge investment in HR functions; academic staff performance is still unconvincing. Why career development and training plans that are set out to retool academic staff are regarded as simplistic, unfocused, and pointless. Why HR officers in academic institutions across the region seem uncoordinated and less bothered.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The 21<sup>st</sup> Century is not only interesting in the way higher education has grumbled for resources to survive, but also has staged a new wave of puzzle in the way university academics are managed by the human resources departments. Reports indicate that the fast-paced changes in the tasks, tools, technologies, and the insatiable societal demands have not only made academics puzzled, but rather have made the entire higher education look unprepared for these new forces. Whereas it may be wise to assume that Human Resource Development (HRD) creates a favorable atmosphere that enables employees to get the best out of themselves, human resource departments across universities are failing to collect themselves together for this truism (Rüdiger, 2007). This

model could have worked well in the business world (Lesly & Valerie, 1996) but replicating such business labels in higher education without proper contextualization is a daunting undertaking (Lesly & Valerie, 1996).

Higher education has not only replicated practice from the business world, but also the business idiom. The human resource departments seem to be lost in this wave of jargons, as the recruitment processes bend so heavily on those who are good at communicating business language during the interviews than technical know-how. While analyzing the effect of human resources management in higher education institutions in Poland, Katarzyna (2018) observed that, universities pay less attention to human resources development strategies and yet without a well implemented human resource function, university academics cannot efficiently and effectively deliver. This is consistent with Witczak and Mitręga (2015) whose remarks allude to the fact that human resource functions have a close bearing on university prestige and competitiveness.

Indisputably, the success of a university just like of any organization depends primarily on the people it employs Katarzyna (2018). There is no institution of higher learning that can develop beyond the level of its academic staff (Nicholas-Omoregbe, Kehinde, Imhonopi, & Evbuoma, 2016; Rou, 1992). This statement is in agreement with the interpretation advanced by Horwitz (1991) who opines that the essence of any institution is in its ability to attract and retain first-class academic staff.

East African universities are cognizant of these realities but they are too slow to put in place drastic measures to restore integrity in the recruitment, and retention processes of their academic staff (Jacob & SeleshoIdah, 2014). Whereas this may not be the case in as far as Ssemugenyi, Asumwa, and Kazibwe (2020) are concerned, on the other hand, it has been repeatedly mentioned that East African universities have not done much to retain their academics (Horwitz, 1991). One may argue that this observation is outdated given the passage of time, but many recent findings such as Powell (2010); James (2015) have all corroborated this finding.

What is not uncommon is the fact that most universities in East Africa are surviving on semi-prepared academics whose ability to invent, innovate and initiate is questionable. It is reported that with the expansion of the knowledge economy, the knowledge produced by higher education system and the skills possessed by its graduates are becoming the deciding factors in promoting economic progress and social welfare (Ssemugenyi, 2019). James (2015) unfortunately, the academics to make this happen are somewhat taken up by other waves. The human resources departments that are meant to align academics in accordance with their talents, retool, and retain for sustainability are seemingly not up to the task and therefore deceitful.

High turnover rate among academics and poor human resource development strategies are perennially threatening to the extent that one wonders whether a change from personnel management to human resource development has had any positive impact to human management. (Ssemugenyi et al., 2020). Human resource development involves the development of a consistent, aligned collection of practices, and policies to facilitate the achievement of the organization's strategic objectives (Melody, 2013). Whereas this is not unknown, human resources departments are consistently failing to address human concerns. Academics are recruited and left alone to sketch their way to excellence with no or limited support from the HR departments.

To understand why things are the way they are, one has to test a number of hypotheses. Could it be appropriate to assume that HR departments are too personalized to a degree of serving individual interests other than organizational interests? Could it be that HR as a discipline is obsolete and less focused? Would one be right to conclude that the HR practices in the East African universities are contextually deprived? Could it be 'one size fits all' model that is making HR practitioners in our universities look so scattered and unserious? Why would human resource training institutions fail to have sound human resource strategies for their academic staff? Whatever the answer may be, these raised questions are intended to guide debate throughout this study.

### 1.1. Problem Statement

Whereas it is common sense to imagine that higher education is the single-most engine of growth and development of any country, on the contrary it is unforgivable if the processes which make this to happen are denied a visible position in the analysis. The human resource processes play a very critical role in driving universities to a desirable and/or recognizable standard. Placing staff in right positions, coaching, mentoring, developing, and rewarding them is one of the optimal answers to the complex challenges facing higher education in East Africa. [Vemic \(2007\)](#) observes that, the increasing complexity, turbulence and uncertainty in higher education sector is one of the testimonies that make human resources development practices somewhat questionable. Although almost all universities offer courses in human resource management and train their students to manage large corporations, regrettably they are unable to manage their own human resources effectively [Anupama \(2019\)](#). It is reported by [Bloom, David, and Kevin \(2006\)](#) that whereas East African higher education had by 1980s completely weakened; her scholarship space later received attention from both internal and external stakeholders due to the special role it was playing in regional transformation ([James, 2015](#)). However, due to failure in placing appropriate academics in right positions, poor rewarding system, complacency of the HR departments, quality concerns among others, have gradually affected the pace of regional transformation.

Evidence on record indicates that while the “hot” issues in education invariably focus on student achievement, funding, quality, access among others, the factors which concern the recruitment, reward, retention and professional development of the workforce are practically less attended to [Michael and Blair \(2000\)](#). It is reported by [Rono \(2015\)](#) that labor strikes by workers in both private and public universities in demand for fair human resource policies and practices have been on the rise in the last two decades. Consistently, [Mary \(2016\)](#) observes that, many private universities in Uganda and Kenya have resorted to cheap part-time academic staff as well as the semi-qualified ones to reduce on the operational cost. While this reasoning may be sound in the economic sense, its effect on the entire higher education fraternity is grave. In Tanzania, the situation is not any better. Whereas evidence on inappropriate human resource development practices in universities in Tanzania is sparse and anecdotal, isolated cases of redundant human resource departments in universities are citable. For instance, [Tolly, Mbweteeand, and Ngirwaba \(2012\)](#) attests that, the role of HR in higher education in Tanzania has little appreciation, training of HR officers in HR Management is therefore urgently needed. The early imagination that higher education can manage HR matters well while relying on macro level policies, Acts and regulations only died away very fast. The levels of disparity across HR departments in universities remain profound and unjustified. This being the case, this study is set out to investigate why the state of human resource development practices in East African universities is so worrying and yet HR as a discipline is one of the core areas sufficiently taught by the same universities.

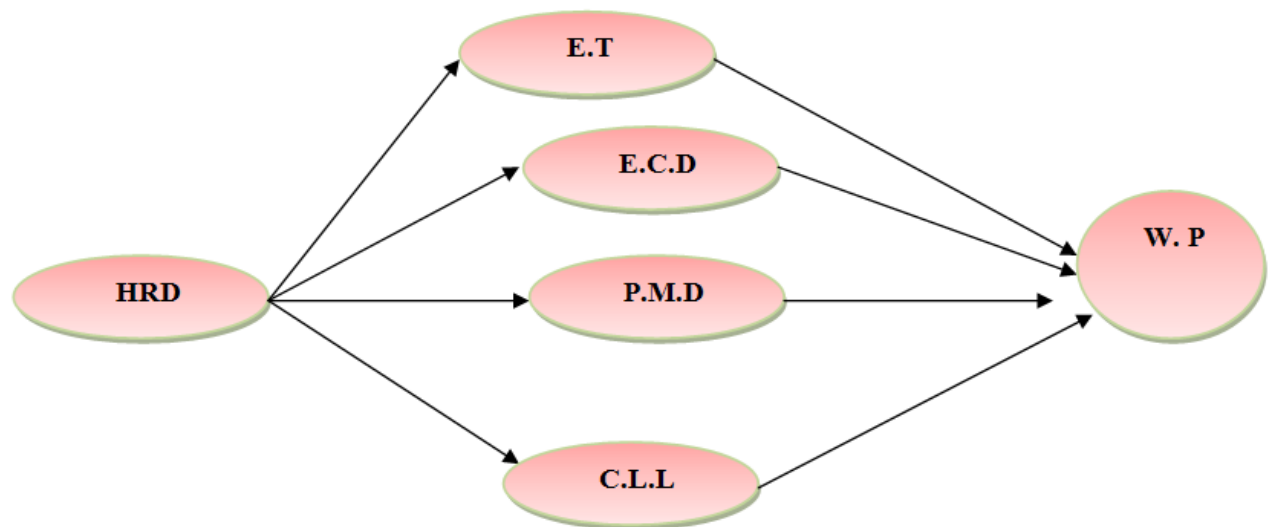
### 1.2. Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the effect of employee training on work performance of academic staff in East African universities.
2. To assess the effect of employee career development on work performance of academic staff in East African universities.
3. To establish the extent to which compliance with labor laws can affect work performance of academic staff in East African universities
4. To determine the influence of performance management and development practices on work performance of academic staff in East African universities.

### 1.3. Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework is an analytical tool with several variations and context ([Richard, 2010](#)). It sets the stage for the presentation of the particular research question that drives the investigation being reported based on

the problem statement. The following framework represents the assumed relationship between the independent variable (HRD) and the dependent variable (performance). It further explains that, when the constructs of (HRD) are jointly analyzed, they give a fair prediction of the dependent variable.



**Figure-1.** The Conceptual Framework Showing the Link between HRD Constructs and Work Performance.

HRD: Human resource development      E.T: Employee training  
 E.C.D: Employee career development      P.M.D: Performance management and development  
 C.L.L: Compliance with labor laws      W.P: Work performance  
 Source: Mapped onto the ideas of Bunch (2007); Gold, Rodgers, and Smith (2003) and Swanson (2001).

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature review can precisely be referred to as an argument, debate between the investigator and the audience (Compte & Preissle, 1993). It is a process of involving the location, reading and evaluating reports of the previous researchers by way of establishing knowledge gaps which appeal for riddance (Amin, 2005). The following debate is intended to unearth knowledge gaps in the existing body of literature and share with the reader the possibilities of bridging them.

### 2.1. Employee Training and Work Performance

Although there is relentless debate about the HRD construct, there is little disagreement that training is a core component of HRD (Gold et al., 2003; Swanson, 2001). The argument that HRD has moved beyond simplistic training belies the historical meaning of training as “planned programs of organizational improvement through changes in skill, knowledge, attitude, or social behavior (Bunch, 2007).

The importance of training on employee work productivity cannot be over emphasized. While looking at the effect of training on employee performance in Uganda, Aidah (2013) observes that training is one of the key ingredients which keep organizations fresh in ideas and tactics relevant for competitive advantage. Her conclusion is backed up by Evans, Pucik, and Barsoux (2002) whose submissions allude that, it is important not to ignore the prevailing evidence on growth of knowledge in the business corporate world in the recent past. On-job-training has revived many organizations (Afshan, Sobia, Kamran, & Nasir, 2012; Ali & Nada, 2018; Maicibi, 2007). This growth has not only been brought about by improvements in technology nor a combination of factors of production but also the increased efforts towards development of organizational human resources (Aidah, 2013).

Whereas there is compelling evidence in the developed world to believe that training and work performance are inseparable entities, there is also evidence to claim otherwise in the developing and undeveloped countries. Evidence on record shows that despite convincing expenditure on staff development programs, many organizations have miserably shutdown. Kay (2007) observes that organizations spend as much as US\$200 billion annually on training and development; however, much of this investment appears squandered on ill-conceived or poorly

implemented interventions (Awoniyi, Griego, & Morgan, 2002). A report made by the New York Daily News (Feiden, 2003) reveals that a U.S.-based organization (Postal Service) wasted millions of dollars on team building and career development programs for employees that did little to revive the glory of Postal Service. The argument now shifts from whether training or career development programs have a positive bearing on work performance of employees or not, to then, the quality of those (HR) who identify career training needs, prepare training content, plan training methods, and evaluation. The quality of HR team plays a very vital role in this regard (Ssekamwa, 1999).

Although there are few serious research studies on the impact of HRD on higher education in East Africa, the available scattered literature is replete with reports of failure. Jimmy (2019) establishes that recruiting unqualified academic staff by the HR to cut down the operational cost is seemingly an endorsed practice in most private universities in Uganda. Consistently, Mamdani (2007) submits that the recruitment process has continued to destroy some of the contemporary functions of a university. The National Council for Higher Education (NCHE) (2014) further notes that competence building is obtained through learning; therefore, every university academic staff must be given all the possible chances to improve academically to enhance professionalism in their respective disciplines.

Isolated cases from Kenyan and Tanzanian-based universities show a similar stance in design and practice. Whereas the Tanzania Commission for Universities (TCU) and the Commission for University Education in Kenya (CUE) are determined to weed out irredeemable HR practices, at the time of this study, no appropriate mechanisms were so far put in place to sanitize the HR processes.

## *2.2. Employee Career Development and Work Performance*

In a study involving 250 civil servants in 15 regional branches of Ministry of Finance of Indonesia, Saud (2017) notes that whereas career development was found relevant in consolidating organizational support, on the contrary it was found less capable to predict a direct influence on employee performance. So unexpected a conclusion! However, several studies have distanced themselves from this conclusion in favor of a positive correlation. For instance, Kurniawan, Rivai, and Suharto (2018) in their study on institutional development attest that career development positively affects employee performance. Empowering staff through knowledge and skill acquisition not only gives birth to a competitive culture but also grants organizations a competitive edge. Wayan, Yuesti, and Sapta (2018) while looking at small and medium enterprises (SMEs) concludes that career development has a positive and significant effect on employee performance. Without applying a lot of logic, it sounds obvious that career development and work performance of employees positively correlate, but when one ventures into the thickets of the term 'career development' and how it predicts employee performance; it becomes evidently clear that a positive correlation is not a must.

Career development in many instances has failed to lift up organizations to the desired standards. While analyzing training and retention as part of career development in the Arab World, Hamed (2018) asserts that, despite huge investment in career development programs, organizations are failing to retain their employees most especially the most talented and qualified ones. In the same vein, Ssekamwa (1999) whose study analyses the viability of career development programs for academic staff in the Ugandan-based universities observes that, the Islamic University in Uganda (IUIU) that pioneered the retention, of its best graduates for academic positions after thorough orientation, coaching and training in best universities across the world later realized that the scheme was not viable as most beneficiaries opted out before they could serve the University. Whereas training staff gives an organization a competitive advantage, one has to be reminded that it is not an end in itself. Practical retention strategies are deemed necessary if an organization is to observe tremendous growth.

Tibarimbasa (2010) opines that, despite high demand for higher education in East Africa, both private and public universities are still hit by the human resource limitations. Consistently, Frank (2009) remarks that all jobs

are done through people, yet over the years most organizations have failed to attach the necessary attention to employee training and development. Whereas Frank's submission may be realistic both in time and space, he shouldn't forget that training and development programs have dominated the HR agenda in the recent past but still little or no tangible results have been realized. This sounds to reason that the matter is not whether trainings are given to employees or not but rather on whether the contents of the trainings really conform to the training needs of the employees.

Although there is relentless debate about the constituents of career development, there is little disagreement that training is a core component of it. The art and science of career development go beyond what an average HR director can imagine (Salas & Kosarzycki, 2003) into the thick thickets of the concept (Sammut, 2001). But the fact that most organizations are infested with young professionals with limited competencies in the HR practices, paying attention to the HR details is still a challenge.

Whereas many researchers may disagree with us on this due to the existing myriad literature supporting the use of younger professionals over their counterparts, the bottom line is simple; they are part of those who do not pay attention to the dynamics in the HR space. In fact, HR is one area that is widely researched but less understood at the same time. The apparent pervasiveness of training failure, despite nearly a century of research, is enough to guarantee that HRD is at the crossroads pleading for liberation.

### *2.3. Performance Management and Development and Work Performance*

The term performance management is traceable in the early writings of a renowned management guru Peter Drucker. He remarks that, a connection between what employees do and the outcome of their effort is what constitutes performance management (PM) (Rajib, 2016). This sounds to reason that, PM is a holistic, largely participatory, and goals congruent process of managing and supervising employees at work (Cardy & Dobbins, 1994). Whereas one may argue that this citation is outdated, earlier and recent studies such as Pankaj (2015); Poon, Wan, Wong, and Cheung (2004) have corroborated this finding. It is therefore tempting to assume that a common agreement on the operationalization of the term is reached despite continuous confusion dominating HR departments in as far as this concept is concerned.

The purpose is to measure improvement, differentiate between levels of performance, determine training needs, validate rewards and identify employees for promotion (Buchner, 2007; McCarthy & Garavan, 2001). Whereas this may go down well in the ears of employees, to the contrary, HR departments across organizations have intentionally or unintentionally paid no attention to it. It is reported by Pankaj (2015) that Indian HR managers have been so reluctant to incorporate PM variables (planning, improving, and reviewing) into the organizational culture on grounds that its essence to boosting performance is not known. This sounds generic and its degree of admissible may be questionable, however, researchers such as McDonald and Smith (1995) whose study involved 437 companies in the USA demonstrated that companies that applied Performance Management outperformed companies without such systems on a wide range of financial and productivity measures.

Regrettably, despite consistence in the human resources literature on the importance of PM in boosting staff performance, until recently, its operationalization is still a challenge to most HR departments. Regardless of organization size and/or staff, managing talent is critical to realizing business objectives. This common thread, however, does not extend to how organizations manage, provide feedback and motivate their talent (Alexander, 2017). Although there is little consensus on the best way to manage employee performance, almost all organizations recognize the value of PM in predicting organizational effectiveness.

From these remarks, one can vividly observe that PM is majorly concerned with a systematic process of aligning employee effort to support organizational priorities. It is further charged with tying organizational goals together with employee expectations, providing coaching and feedback that helps employees improve performance.

#### 2.4. Compliance with labor laws and Work Performance

Literature on labor laws as predictors of employee performance is sparse and anecdotal, but as one forages through the available recorded evidence, it is observable that a common agreement is reached. According to Josephat (2011) while PM guides appropriately on HR-employee relationship, policies, regulations, and laws provide a rigid approach to managing and controlling human actions in an organization.

Whereas it is common knowledge that policies, regulations, and laws are critical when employee key performance indicators are not met or when discipline is required, it is not fortunate to report that most organizations do not apply them as and when required. Using Makerere University as a reference point, the impasse between the two renowned professors (Stella Nyanzi and Mahmood Mamdani), that was later decided in court in favor of Prof Nyanzi was as a result of the HR failure to implement its own regulations way before this rift (Nakkazi, 2020). The lack of permanent academic staff, offering unaccredited academic programs, and continuous closure of universities in Uganda is partly rooted in the HR failures (Katusiimeh, 2020). In the same spirit it is reported that in private universities such as Kampala University, Uganda Christian University Mukono, Mount Kenya University among others, policies, and regulations are neither respected nor complied with. What can one expect of a university that operates on an expired provisional license or the statutory charter? If they can defy the requirements set forth by the oversight institutions, what of their internal policies? It is ridiculous to have this kind of attitude in institutions of higher learning, where in actual sense would be centres of best practices (Ssemugenyi, 2019). Although noncompliance to regulations is taking a central focus in the affairs of higher education practitioners, the precise logic of this kind of attitude is more often than not remains rather cloudy.

The HR departments are also caught up in the middle of their game on two critical aspects all of which are fundamental to the success of universities. They recognize the fact that universities grow because of the cutting edge research outputs, and problem-based learning (Fred, Asumwa, & Sophia, 2019). Whereas this conviction may be valid, the HR departments are failing to realize that research-based academics are not treated fairly as opposed to the ordinary lecturers; there is no career path within research and many research-based academics opt out for better employment alternatives in fear of uncertainties in academia (Hasluck, Pitcher, & Simm, 2001). There is room for ordinary lecturers to grow because of the availability of the career path, but in practice, recruitment emphasis is on research-based academics and yet no or minimal provision is given to them for career path.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

Methodology is the systematic and theoretical analysis of the techniques applied to a field of study. It systematically describes the procedures that have been followed in conducting a study (Olive, Mugenda, & Mugenda, 2003) cited in Ssemugenyi et al. (2020). In light of this, the study adopted a mixed method approach that rests entirely on the application of both qualitative and quantitative models of analysis (Fred et al., 2019). The Post-positivist paradigm (for quantitative) which draws from the deterministic philosophy examines the cause and how other causes in the causal chain interact and/or influence outcome. This study partly adopted this model because the intention was to establish how the cause (IV) comes in contact with the extraneous variables to explain a change in the dependent/effect (DV). This deductive model adopts the philosophy that reality can be discovered only in a probabilistic sense (Creswell, 2003).

Whilst the qualitative model which too took prominence in this study, inductively assumes that reality is subjective, and that multiple realities exist. In view of this context, the study further obtained responses from the key informants as a means to verify whether the obtained quantitative data consistently inform qualitative data.

#### 3.1. Target Population

The target population consisted of three strata that is; the human resources directors/registrars, professors/senior academic staff, junior academic staff, and one key informant from the oversight institutions for

higher education across East Africa. This diversity in the categorization of the respondents intended to bring out a holistic view about the problem under investigation and to minimize bias. A statistically obtained sample size of 120 respondents drawn from 400 total population by the use of Krejcie and Mogan sample size determination matrix-1970 was considered for this study. Quantitative data were collected using self-administered questionnaires while qualitative data by the use of interview guide, yet secondary data were obtained through document reviews and analysis. The descriptive statistical tools for quantitative data such as means, frequency counts and standard deviation were used at the univariate level, while correlations, and multi-regression analysis at the multivariate level.

### 3.2. Findings of the Study

To establish that work quality of academic staff is a function of HRD, the study tested a null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ) that presupposed that; HRD does not significantly affect work quality of academic staff. Four items of the independent variable (HRD) were measured against the dependent variable as provided in the multiple regression matrix below

Multiple regression analysis was used to determine whether independent variables ( $X_1$ ,  $X_2$ ,  $X_3$  and  $X_4$ ) simultaneously affect the dependent variable ( $Y$ ).

**Table-1. Multiple Regression Analysis Showing the Impact of IV on the DV**

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	2.318	.509		4.552	0.00000
Compliance with Laws	.528	.116	.323	2.834	0.00460
Employee Training	.983	.055	.970	7.975	0.00014
Performance Management	.453	.057	.419	1.393	0.00047
Career Development	.975	.147	.507	3.651	0.00022

Note: Dependent Variable: Work Performance.

To investigate the effect of compliance with laws ( $X_1$ ), employee training ( $X_2$ ), performance management ( $X_3$ ), and career development ( $X_4$ ) on work performance ( $Y$ ), the regression model was generated,  $Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3 + \beta_4 X_4$ . This model suggests that, a unit increase in compliance with laws causes an increased change in work performance equivalent to 528, a unit increase in employee training causes an increased change of 983 in work performance, similarly, a unit increase in performance management causes an increased change in work performance equivalent to 453, and lastly, a unit increase in career development, attracts an increased change of 975 in work performance. The equation further indicates that all the four sub elements of the independent variable significantly affect the dependent variable. At 95% level of confidence, employee training had 0.00014 level of significance while career development had 0.00022 level of significance hence the least and the most factors affecting work performance of academic staff.

Whereas the numerical findings of this study are in agreement with many earlier findings, this consistence shouldn't be used as basis for their validity. It may be as it is because of the weaknesses in the instrument used to obtain data from the respondents. The restricted Likert scale could have denied the respondents the freedom to express their opinions in any way possible to the best of their understanding. While one may argue this case from this point of view, it should be noted with emphasis that this bias was mitigated through triangulation method where consistence in findings was checked by the use of another reliable method. Interestingly, in this study the qualitative data too appealed to the numerical data, suggesting that the consistence may not be by chance.

In specific terms, the qualitative data obtained through interviews suggest that career development and employee training are the most critical aspects of HRD and if well integrated into the HR practices, employee performance naturally blossoms. At the time of the interview, 85% of the key informants attested that staff



performance in most universities is a challenge because the HR officers are failing to come to an agreement over the key parameters which constitute performance in higher education. Key informants maintain that, whereas it is common sense that employee training, career development significantly predict work performance, in real sense, most HR officers seem unaware of this reality. At the time of this study, this was a common denominator in most young private universities in the region.

Key informants further observe that, while it is true that all the four parameters of the independent variable in this study predict work performance in varying ways, it shouldn't be forgotten that the current HRD practices in higher education are far from achieving this. At the time of the study, it was observed that most professors are not comfortable with the way HR affairs are run. *One of the key informants observes that, the fact that it is an academic institution, senior academics need to play a very crucial role in determining who to recruit in their academic units, as well as how to retain, and compensate staff.* Centralizing HR functions may work for some small institutions, but may be a dreadful undertaking to big colleges with multiple academic functions.

Key informants also noted with concern that, the intended widening gap between the academic staff and the HR officers is bound to cause an irreversible catastrophe never before recorded in the history of higher education in East Africa if not addressed. Whereas the human resource academics think that they are better placed to handle human resource related matters in an academic context, and further think that having human resource departments is a waste of resources, practice seems to suggest otherwise. At the time of the study, good business-based institutions known for producing competitive human resource graduates like Kampala International University (KIU) in Uganda, Strathmore University (SU) in Nairobi Kenya to mention but a few, were found having centralized human resource departments.

#### 4. DISCUSSIONS

The role of higher education in sustainable social, political and economic development is not contestable. With few resources, inadequate capacity and a history of neglect, the sector has been struggling over the years to respond to increasing demands including capacity gaps. Whereas this is a truism, most human resource officers at the time of this study seemed less bothered. They have reduced HR functions to only recruitment and firing while neglecting the most critical aspects like career development, staff mapping, performance management, HR planning and forecast among others. Evidence on record still indicates that, HR departments in some institutions operate on huge budgets through their quality of work is still questionable. This finding is in line with [Awoniyi et al. \(2002\)](#) and [Kay \(2007\)](#) who allude that despite convincing expenditure on staff development programs, many organizations have miserably shutdown. They further note that organizations spend as much as US\$200 billion annually on training and development; however, much of this investment appears squandered on ill-conceived or poorly implemented interventions. While their submissions may be doubted due to the passage of time, most recent studies like [Maicibi \(2007\)](#); [Afshan et al. \(2012\)](#) and [Ali and Nada \(2018\)](#) have corroborated their observations.

This study further notes that career development is a fundamental function of HRD (Sig value 0.00022) and addressing it in its rightful sense may significantly contribute to staff performance and thence aid institutional survival. Consistently, [Kurniawan et al. \(2018\)](#) and [Wayan et al. \(2018\)](#) attest that career development positively affects employee performance. Whereas this may be the case with the quantitative findings in this study, qualitative data gathered from the key informants seem to view this with different lenses. They claim that, most of the career development plans and interventions offered do not match with the institutional vision, employment gaps, and resources, among others. At the time of this study, institutions like KIU, had a well career development plan for their staff, but regrettably it was reported that almost 85% of the academic staff who benefite from this scheme have since left the University.

Key informants further note that, the misery is not yet over as long as university affairs inclusive of the HR business are not placed in the hands of the academics. Universities should utilize their HR academics to handle HR

business. They further note that all HR officers in institutions of higher learning are not academics by career, and relying on them to determine how performance should be measured in an academic context is a serious joke. This sounds to reason that, universities have to devise a context specific HRD model that is tailored to the needs and aspirations of the academic staff. Involving academic staff in the recruitment process, training, and retention programs is critical for the survival of higher education. This may reduce the incessant debate that seems to suggest that the HRD practices in higher education are misguided missiles that are yet to detonate.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

This study concludes with an appeal to HR practitioner in higher education. There is need for the HR practitioners to learn continuously to be ready for changes and create an environment that maximizes chances for institutional survival and success. The study observes that the diverse experiences of the employees, which are mainly related to their cultures, competencies, academic backgrounds among others are just enough to make institutions visible. It is time for the HR departments to focus on the pool of talents they have in stock, be willing to learn from them, and use them for the transference of learning to other academic staff that may be professionally weak through training.

The study established that professionalism is a product of the motivation to learn, the awareness of the need to learn, the need for development of knowledge, skills, attitudes and values, the work attitude, and the self-management of learning and development. HRD programs should therefore focus on enhancing these aspects of the workforce.

The ill-conceived or poorly executed HRD programs reflect a high degree of incompetence among the HR staff. Whereas it is quantitatively established in this study that HRD positively affects staff performance, on the other hand, some key informants observed otherwise. They indicated that HRD practices which are limited to training in most universities have consistently offered irrelevant trainings to academic staff.

The study notes that a condescending attitude by the academic staff towards training has not only undermined the HR functions, but has also rendered the profession useless and invisible. Academics have always been critical and resistant to almost all HR functions in universities across the region. Although it is true that most HR officers have for long played null to matters bothering academics, a reciprocal response of the same measure from the academic staff may not solve the puzzle. The disregard for sound practices is an immediate cause of failure but also a reflection of cultural barriers that can circumvent the best-designed program. Failure to attach value to career development plans such as training on grounds that, HR trainings extended to academic staff are usually pointless, simplistic, and unfocused, thus generating behaviors such as; nonattendance of training sessions, rejecting recommendations made by the trainers, discouraging transfer of learning to the job, and failing to recognize positive transfers.

## 6. RECOMMENDATIONS

Whereas there has been a great deal of research works on the HRD processes, it is quite regrettable to establish that such studies have not received the attention that they so rightly deserve. For this matter therefore, they have had limited influence on most practitioners. At the time of this study, some practitioners seemed indistinct yet others confused, and a few less bothered. In light of this, the study is hereby suggesting a practical solution to inform practice and redirect reasoning in the HRD context. Having observed that most of the HRD practices are foreign imposed, there is need for the practitioners to understand the prevailing context and design a framework that suits the existing working conditions. Copying HRD strategies because they were once effective in Europe and/or the USA is a dreadful undertaking and an inferior practice. Effort should be placed on answering questions such as; what is our context, how do we want it to be, what kind of academic staff best suit our context, what unique

features in our context best define us, and what implications does our context have on Higher Education? The future of HR in an academic context is bright only if these questions are integrated into the HRD plan.

The myriad reviewed literature in this study stages a fresh lacuna that most previous studies ignored. Whereas the previous studies labored to explain the causal relationship between HRD and work performance and analyzing HRD constructs in a more explicit manner, they failed to extend their debate to another level so as to guide practice. Practically observed is the fact that, their studies rarely extend and appeal to the organizational culture and yet in most cases it is culture that stimulates or impedes operations. Adopting a methodology used to examine the impact of organizational culture on functions of HRD and how the same affects employee performance may be a logical start to solving HRD challenges.

Although it is true that the oversight institutions for higher education whose mandate is to ensure compliance have failed on their primary role, it is not wise to leave matters of human resources only in the hands of the individual universities. Councils for higher education have only emphasized quality assurance in the content/curricula, and structural areas hence leaving other crucial aspects like HR functions in the hands of universities. Cognizant of this reality, this study recommends that the roles of the said councils be extended to tackle HR businesses across universities.

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