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Impact of Qualifications Alignment on Employee Job Satisfaction: Evidence from Integrated Employees of Defunct Local Authorities in Kericho County, Kenya

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Abstract:

In 2010, Kenya entered a new constitutional dispensation which established 47 counties from 175 local authorities. When the actual roll-out of devolution started in 2013, it emerged that the process was more cumbersome and complex than it had been envisaged initially. Various difficulties were reported during devolution which continue to plague many counties to date. Among the challenges noted was poor management and integration of human resources that erstwhile belonged to the defunct local authorities. Therefore, this article examines the effect of qualifications alignment as a strategy of employee integration criteria on job satisfaction, based on a study of the staff of redundant local governments among employees absorbed into the County Government of Kericho, Kenya. The study used descriptive survey design and it adopted mixed research methods whereby both quantitative and qualitative data were collected from the sample. The target population of the study was four hundred and two employees. A sample of two hundred was selected and one hundred and forty (140) respondents participated in the study by filing and returning the questionnaires. Moreover, four key informant interviews were held. The researcher employed stratified sampling to recruit the study participants. Purposive sampling was used to select the four key interviewees. Quantitative data was analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics and Correlation and multiple regression were used to test the hypothesis. The results were presented in narrative, tables and graphs. The findings of the study showed that, on qualifications alignment, 36% of the employees were dissatisfied while 64% were satisfied. The study concludes that most of the defunct local authorities' staff in Kericho County were satisfied with the integration on the basis of qualification alignment. The study makes a practical contribution towards addressing the deployment of employees integrated into the County Governments in Kenya. The County Government should carry out appraisal of all integrated employees from defunct local authorities to ensure that the minority who are not satisfied with integration have their concerns addressed appropriately in order to achieve 100% job satisfaction among the employees and to improve service delivery.

Keywords: Qualifications alignment, employee job satisfaction, local authorities, Kericho, Kenya

1. Introduction

The concept of job satisfaction describes the cumulative feelings and dispositions that workers project towards their occupations. Affirmative and approving attitudes towards work testify to job satisfaction whereas deleterious and adversarial dispositions show the opposite (Armstrong, 2006).

Smoke (2012) points out that devolved system of government has been successful in most countries of the World like US, Sweden, UK, India, South Africa and Nigeria. The scholar also notes that there are various types of devolved systems of governance practiced by different countries; for example, the US, Nigeria and India are for federal states system. South Africa has a devolved system of government with regional governments headed by a premier while the national government retains supervisory and oversight roles. In East Africa, Uganda has been documented to practice devolution through kingdoms/districts while Tanzania practices it through regions known as Jimbos. Other countries in Africa practicing devolved systems are Rwanda and Namibia (World Bank, 2012; Smoke, 2012).

All these different systems of devolution have varied challenges relating to the management of its resources. The key challenge is human resources personnel who are charged with the key responsibility of delivering essential services to citizens of the particular devolved units. These challenges faced by devolved units, especially that of human capital, if not handled well, can lead to poor performance of these units in their quest for service delivery. In Uganda, the constitution

provides that each district will have its own commission or agency handling human resource personnel called District Service Commission (DSC). This is similar to Kenya's County Public Service Boards. In Uganda, DSC members were normally appointed to the office by politicians leading to a situation in which DSCs were always used to influence public service recruitment for political needs.

1.1. Policies and Administrative of HR Practices

The historical role of Human Resources (HR) has drastically changed since its inception in the early 1900s. Contemporary HR places emphasis on strategic planning which is seen as a means to achieving organizational objectives and aims. The constitution of Kenya, promulgated in 2010, puts the onus on the HR departments to accept the challenge of doing more with less, while contributing towards both levels of governments' objectives (Transitional Authority [TA], 2013). Human resources also have to address the rapidly changing conditions affecting the types of employees required and their changing needs; therefore, the function requires inclusive and skilled experts. Human resources strategic planning has become an integral part of doing business hence HR professionals must be both professional in field and competent business persons.

The Kenya Vision 2030 blueprint emphasizes that the country has to embark on the long journey of developing policies to create a global competitive and flexible personnel base courtesy of life-long orientation and training. As a priority, a human resource database has been established to facilitate better planning of human resources in the country (Government of Kenya [GOK], 2007). Therefore, human resources should be managed well for the benefit of the organizations and the individuals working in those organizations. Mullins (2002) avers that some organizations have made huge profits due to their pragmatic administrative styles and practical policies. These policies are likely to make employees deliver quality services to the target consumers.

1.2. Qualification and Job Alignment

Professional qualifications help employees in discharging their duties effectively. Aligning work with skills and qualification ensures maximum output from the employees. Professional training and skills empowerment have been identified as one of the factors that guides policy makers while making placement. Hiebert, McCarthy and Repello (2001) observe that there appear to be linkages between training institutions and policy makers who do placement. Additionally, it has been noted that few countries appear to address diversity of qualification and aligning these qualifications to the correct placement.

It has been observed that policy makers in government and private organizations throughout the world have become increasingly concerned with the match or alignment between the work force skills and qualification and the labour market's needs. Unqualified and unskilled human resource base contributes to the economic backwardness of a society (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2011). Due to unemployment and few job opportunities, many people accept employment that do not match their skills and qualifications (Cedefop, 2010).

Quitini (2011) notes that advanced countries have high rates of over qualified people which can be as high as over 40% employees in works outside their area of expertise. Similarly, OECD (2011) affirms that developed countries have high rates of over qualified youths. For example, 30% in Peru and 21% in Armenia are over qualified and their skills do not match with the work they are doing. In less developed economies, levels of under qualified workers are high reaching 82% in Malawi, 56% in Cambodia and 55% in Togo (OECD, 2011).

1.3. Statement of the Problem

Since independence in Kenya in 1963, political leaders have held two divergent views about devolution. One view offers potential for the country to redress perceived ethnic and political biases by giving local communities control over resources, including human resources and decisions about service delivery. The second view holds that devolution could undermine national unity by fragmenting state powers or by decentralizing corruption leaving the citizens worse, or worse still local leaders and elites could capture resources to the detriment of the majority of the newly established devolved units (World Bank, 2012). When devolution was rolled out in 2013, there were indeed fears that the counties might fail to put in place systems to integrate human, among other, resources for effective service delivery.

Following implementation of the new constitution in 2013, the HR audit conducted by the TA noted that some of the staff in the counties were not deployed or integrated well. The most affected were those who had served under the defunct local authorities. Some of these employees were not integrated according to the skills, work experience and relevant qualifications they possessed, but on the basis of favouritism or political affiliations (TA, 2013). It was further observed that the work environment of some of these employees were not conducive. Some of the officers did not have the requisite space, basic office resources, tools and equipment to enable them undertake their duties. As a result, the audit revealed that most of the integrated employees were demotivated and their service delivery to the public was low. There seems to be no evidence as to whether or not corrective measures were undertaken to rectify this problem. It is on this basis that the study sought to establish the effects of qualifications alignment on the job satisfaction level of employees of defunct local authorities' employees absorbed into the County Government of Kericho, Kenya.

2. Materials and Methods

The study was carried out in Kericho County Government, one of the 47 counties in Kenya. This study site was chosen purposively. According to the 2009 Kenya Housing and Population Census, the county had a population of 758,339 (CRA, 2013). Kericho County is known for its large tea industry. Its tea is among the best in the world largely due to its

good quality and flavour. Subsistence farming is also practiced in the county. A large part of the Mau forest, considered Kenya's biggest water catchment towers area, lies in the County. The forest gives rise to some of the major rivers among them the Ewaso Ng'iro River, Sondu River, Mara River and Njoro River.

Kericho County lies between longitude 35° 02' and 35° 40' East and between the equator and latitude 0 23' South. The County is bordered by the Uasin Gishu County to the north, Baringo County to the northeast, Nandi to the northwest, Nakuru County to the east and Bomet County to the south. It is bordered to the South West by Nyamira and Homa Bay Counties and to the West by Kisumu County. The County covers a total of 2,479 km². The County is composed of six sub-counties, namely Kipkelion East, Kipkelion West, Kericho West/Belgut, Kericho East, Sigowet/Soin and Bureti.

The target population for the research was 402 employees who were integrated to Kericho County government from the six (6) defunct local authorities that existed in Kericho by then, namely Kericho municipal council, Bureti county council, county council of Kipsigis, Town council of Litein, Town council of Londiani and Town council of Kipkelion. The instruments for data collection used in the study were questionnaire, interview schedule and document analysis. Among the relevant documents that the researcher reviewed include Transitional Authority reports and other available reports with information on deployment of employees. A total of one hundred and forty (140) employees filled questionnaires administered by the researcher, coded and analysed. Quantitative data was analysed using descriptive statistics while qualitative data was analysed thematically.

3. Results and Discussion

The study sought to assess the effect of qualifications alignment on job satisfaction level of employees of defunct local authorities. Descriptive statistics were obtained, followed by testing of hypothesis and finally the predictive component of qualifications alignment on job satisfaction was established.

3.1. Descriptive Analysis

The results of descriptive analysis were as shown in Table 1 below.

Satisfied With	1 F (%)	2 F (%)	3 F (%)	4 F (%)	5 F (%)	Mean	Std
Current job	9(6.4)	17(12.1)	23(16.4)	61(43.6)	30(21.4)	3.61	1.14
Current job deployment	16(11.4)	19(13.6)	14(10.0)	57(40.7)	34(24.3)	3.53	1.31
Job experiences per my qualifications	12(8.6)	13(9.3)	18(12.9)	57(40.7)	40(28.6)	3.71	1.22
Training and development practices	31(22.1)	21(15.0)	33(23.6)	41(29.3)	14(10.0)	2.90	1.32
Promotion as per qualifications of employees from former local authority	50(35.7)	30(21.4)	19(13.6)	27(19.3)	14(10.0)	2.46	1.40

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics on Alignment of Qualifications

Key: 1 = Very Low Extent, 2=Low Extent, 3= Undecided, 4=Large Extent, 5 = Very Large

Source: Researchers (2018)

Table 1 shows that 9(6.4%) were satisfied with their jobs to a very low extent, 17(12.1%) were satisfied to a low extent, 23(16.4%) were undecided, 61(43.6%) were satisfied to a large extent while 30(21.4%) were satisfied to a very large extent. The mean score was 3.61 with a standard deviation of 1.14. This indicated that more than a half of the respondents were satisfied with their jobs at that moment.

With regard to job satisfaction according to the qualifications, 16(11.4%) were satisfied with to a very low extent, 19(13.6%) were satisfied to a low extent, 14(10.0%) were undecided, 57(40.7%) were satisfied to a large extent while 34(24.3%) were satisfied to a very large extent. The mean score was 3.53 with a standard deviation of 1.31. This showed that more than a half of the respondents were satisfied with their jobs according to qualifications they possessed.

On satisfaction with job experiences commensurate with qualifications, 12(8.6%) of the respondents were satisfied to a very low extent, 13(9.3%) to a low extent while 18 (12.9%) were undecided, 57(40.7%) were satisfied to a large extent while 40(28.6%) were satisfied to a very large extent. The mean score of this item was 3.71 with a standard deviation of 1.22. The mean was greater than the average mean score of 2.5 indicating that more than a half of the respondents were satisfied with the job experiences

On satisfaction with training and development practices carried out, 31(22.1%) were satisfied to a very low extent, 21 (15.0%) to a low extent while 33 (23.6%) were undecided. Forty-one (29.3%) were satisfied to a large extent while 14(10.0%) were satisfied to a very large extent. The mean score was 2.90 with a standard deviation of 1.32. This showed that majority of the respondents were contended with training and development practices conducted.

With respect to the way promotion was done as per the qualifications of employees from former local authority, 50 (35.7%) were satisfied to a very low extent, 30 (21.4%) to a low extent while 19 (13.6%) were undecided. Twenty-seven (19.3%) were satisfied to a large extent and 14 (10.0%) were satisfied to a very large extent. The mean score was 2.46 with a standard deviation of 1.40. The mean score was less than the average score indicating that most of the respondents were dissatisfied with the way promotion from the former local authorities was done.

The overall levels of job satisfaction as a result of qualifications alignment were as presented in Figure 1 below.

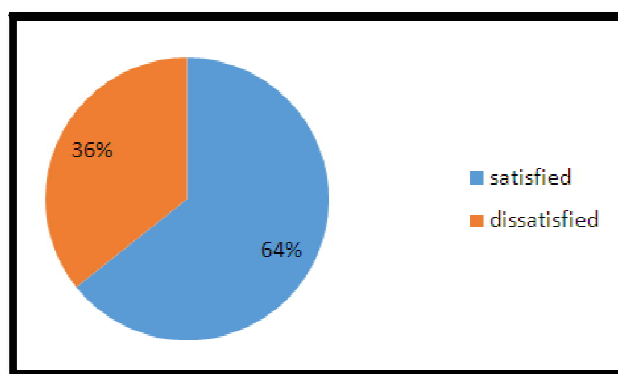


Figure 1: Qualifications Alignment and Job Satisfaction
Source: Researchers (2018)

Figure 1 shows that 36% of the respondents were dissatisfied with their job's alignment on the basis of qualifications while 64% were satisfied. This implied that more than a half of the workers were satisfied with their current jobs as per their qualifications.

3.2. Hypothesis Test Results

In order to test whether qualifications alignment had a significant effect on job satisfaction, the following null hypothesis was advanced:

- H_{02} : There is no significant effect of qualification alignment on the job satisfaction of employees of defunct local authorities.

The test was conducted using Pearson Moment Correlation and the results were as presented in Table 2 below.

		Qualification alignment	Job Satisfaction
Qualification alignment	Pearson Correlation	1	.560**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000

Table 2: Alignment of Qualifications and Job Satisfaction Correlations

** Correlation Is Significant at the 0.01 Level (2-Tailed), N=140

Source: Researchers (2018)

Table 2, shows that there was a significant positive relationship between qualification alignment and job satisfaction ($r=.560$, $P=0.000$). The null hypothesis was thus rejected, and it was concluded that qualification alignment influenced job satisfaction. The positive relationship implied that when workers' qualifications are well aligned to their jobs, there will be a high level of job satisfaction.

3.3. Prediction of Job Satisfaction from Qualification Alignment

Simple regression analysis was carried out to determine the predictive power of alignment of qualifications on employee job satisfaction. The results were as shown in Table 3 below.

Model		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.506	10.988	.000
	Qualification alignment	.564	8.021	.000

Table 3: Simple Regression of Alignment of Qualifications on Job Satisfaction

a. Dependent Variable: Job Satisfaction

Source: Researchers (2018)

Table 3 indicates that qualification alignments is a significant predictor of job satisfaction among the workers of Kericho County ($B = 0.564$, $p=0.000$). It resulted in the Equation (i).

$Jobsatisfaction(JS) = 1.506 + 0.564(Qualificationalignment).....Equation (i)$

This means that from a constant value of 1.506, a unit change in qualifications alignment will result in increase in job satisfaction by 0.564 times.

Aligning work with skills and qualification ensures maximum output from the employees. Professional training and skills empowerment have been identified as one of the factors that guides policy makers while making placement. Unqualified and unskilled human resource base contributes to the economic backwardness of a society (OECD, 2011). The GOK (2016) outlines that placement of employees in an office to serve should be on the basis of qualification and competencies which include abilities, knowledge, skills and experiences that match and enable the officer to carry out the tasks and responsibilities well.

Many studies that have been carried out all over the world affirm that proper integration of employees in any organization enhances and contributes to positive effects of the organization in terms of production, job retention as well as overall job satisfaction. Further, it enhances team work and increases job enlargement level (Sims, 2010). Deb (2006) adds that proper integration of employees into any organization tends to stabilize employees and hence increase the level of job satisfaction.

From the results of the study, the employees who were integrated from defunct local authorities to work in the County government of Kericho were satisfied with integration process as shown in From Figure 1, however, there were still a minority who were dissatisfied on the integration criteria as far as qualification alignments was concerned. Nonetheless, on alignments of integration of employees with their qualifications, majority were satisfied with their placement. On this issue of qualification and placement, Cedefop (2010) asserts that, due to unemployment, only few individuals accept employment that does not match their skills and qualifications.

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

The study hypothesized that there is no significant effect of qualifications alignment on the job satisfaction of employees of defunct local authorities. From the results of the study, it is concluded that there is a positive significant relationship between alignment of qualifications and job satisfaction. This implies that majority of the employees of defunct local authorities are aligned well with their respective qualifications. Therefore, a positive relationship exists between qualifications alignment and job satisfaction of employees of defunct local authorities currently working in the County Government of Kericho in Kenya. The county government should carry out appraisal of all integrated employees from defunct local authorities to ensure that the minority who are not satisfied with integration have their concerns addressed appropriately in order to achieve 100% job satisfaction among the employees and to improve service delivery.

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