

Effect of Merit Selection on Employee Performance in Public Health Institutions in Kisumu County, Kenya

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Abstract: *The study established the effect of merit selection on employee performance in Public Health Institutions in Kisumu County, Kenya. The research was anchored on Social Exchange Theory (Holmans, 1958) and Human Capital Theory (Becker, 2009), adopting a descriptive cross-sectional survey design. Primary data was gathered from a target population of 1,354 using structured questionnaires, yielding a 94.5% response rate. Data analysis and hypothesis testing were conducted through a simple linear regression model. The findings revealed that merit selection has a significant effect on employee performance. The research contributed to theory, policy, methodology, management, and practice by confirming that merit selection significantly improves employee performance. However, the study was limited by its reliance on a descriptive cross-sectional survey design. Future research should employ diverse statistical methods to better examine correlations among the study variables.*

Keywords: Merit Selection, Employee Performance, Public Health Institutions

1. Introduction

Merit selection is a procedure that involves recruitment and induction of new workers on their new assignment (Sangeetha, 2021). According to Aryeetey (2024), merit selection gives applicants opportunity to compete fairly in an interview. When firms make selection decisions, they take into consideration leadership skills, competency, practical experience and capacity of a prospective candidate that match job prerequisite (Web, 2025).

Moreover, merit selection attracts employees with the right education, knowledge, experience and behavioral competencies (Muema et al., 2020). However, divergent and convergent views surfaced among scholars on how merit selection record significant effect on employee performance. Convergent views (Mukwa 2018; Olatunji 2013; Mutua 2022; Samuel 2024) found merit selection has significant effect on employee performance. Divergent views, (Tsuma 2019; Ndunguru 2024; Muma et al., 2020; Adeyemi 2025) found merit selection insignificant effect on employee performance. Consequently, discussions regarding merit selection and employee performance remain inconsistent, and without consensus among human resource management scholars. Moreover, most existing studies have been conducted in European and other African countries, which differ from the Kenyan context.

This study is anchored on social exchange theory (Holmans, 1958). It asserted that constant engagement among employees in a firm helps create an environment for sharing work and skills, thereby reducing under performance. The theory assumed that there is effect of merit selection on employee performance (Samuel, 2024). Human capital

theory (Becker, 2009) opined that workers abilities, knowledge and skills are valued resources that contributes to firm success. It emphasizes that training and development investment might increase both firm and employee performance (Kaufman et al., 2023). Besides, the theory predicts that there is effect of merit selection on employee performance.

Public health institutions are government owned health facilities mandated with offering health services to her citizen (GoK, 2019). However, the county's doctor to patient ratio is 1: 44,634; and nurse to patient 1: 2,383 contrary to WHO recommendation of either Doctor or Nurse ratio to patient 1: 4,602 pointing to inadequate number of trained health workers to deliver excellent health services to the people (WHO, 2010). This huge disparity between health workers to patient ratio impedes efficient service delivery. The government restriction on new employment until 2025 due to swelling wage bill worsen the employee gap bridge. Consequently, merit selection is central to this research, serving as the foundation for effect of merit selection on employee performance in Public Health Institutions in Kisumu County.

2. Literature Review

Social exchange theory (Holmans, 1958) asserted that constant engagement among employees in a firm helps create an environment for sharing work and skills, thereby reducing underperformance. The theory assumed that there is significant effect of merit selection on employee performance (Samuel, 2024). Thus, organizations aligns its educated and knowledgeable employees for purposes of improving employee performance (Hassan, 2020). This theory underpins

current study. The theory predicts that experience and competent behavior improve an employee's ability to perform efficiently, encouraging them to stay longer with the firm. Conversely, merit selection has no significant effect on employee performance (Copel, 2022).

The relevance of the theory lies in its social nature, which allows employees to share knowledge freely through peer coaching, career development, and management trainee programs (Amahwa, 2021). However, the social exchange theory has attracted global reservations from various researchers. The model assumes that the closeness attained in employee relationships is linear in nature, ignoring the idiosyncratic steps of traditional relationships (Garg, 2025). Moreover, the assumption that highly skilled employees will easily train those with performance problems is unrealistic; some individuals might appear knowledgeable but are incapable of transferring knowledge to colleagues, even if they share an intimate working relationship (Bernston, 2023).

Human capital theory (Becker, 2009) opined that workers' abilities, knowledge, and skills are valued resources that contribute to firm success. Furthermore, investment in training and development can increase both firm and employee performance (Kaufman et al., 2023). The theory predicts that there is effect of merit selection on employee performance.

The relevance of the theory lies in its recognition of talent management and career development as determinants of employee performance. However, the theory only focuses on employee competency and knowledge at the expense of institutional culture, teamwork, and contextual factors influencing employee performance (Sibian, 2022).

However, Olatunji (2013) examined the link between succession management, merit selection and workers' performance in identified workplaces in Nigeria. A survey research design with sample size of 150 participants. Data collected through interviews and questionnaires. Olatunji found that succession management practices and merit selection process were positively correlated with employee performance. However, the research focused on succession management, merit selection and workers' performance while this research focused on the effect of merit selection and employee performance.

Adeyemi (2025) probed the effect of merit selection on succession planning and staff performance in public hospitals, Nigeria. It was a survey design. Total population of 117 participants. His study employed Likert scale questionnaire method to gather primary data. Data analyzed by use of bivariate correlation and multiple linear regression model. He found that merit selection insignificantly influences succession and employee performance.

Samuel (2024) investigated the impact of merit selection and staff retention on employee performance within listed family businesses in the Mwanza region, Tanzania. Utilizing a descriptive survey design, the study employed a stratified random sampling method to select a sample of 694 participants from a total population of 5,285. Primary data

were collected using questionnaires and interview guides, while secondary data were gathered through a review of related documents. Both descriptive and inferential statistics were utilized for data analysis. Samuel established a strong connection between merit selection, staff retention, and employee performance. His study was conducted within the Tanzanian context while the present research focuses on Kisumu County, Kenya, thereby exploring a different environmental and geographical setting.

Mukwa (2018) studied influence of recruitment strategies on staff performance in Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology in Kakamega; Kenya. The study selected a sample of 124 staff and questionnaire was adopted in data collection. Further, descriptive and inferential statistics were used in analyzing data. Mukwa found a significant correlation among recruitment strategies and staff performance. The research concentrated on overall recruitment strategies and neglected merit selection—an aspect the current study seeks to address, as it is critical for organizational success.

From (Olatunji, 2013; Adeyemi, 2025; Mukwa, 2018) studies, there is still uncertain information on the effect of merit selection on employee performance (Maguta, 2020). Besides, many research has been conducted in other European and African countries with mixed conclusions and confirms that merit selection varies depending on context and leadership development. Few local research has provided scanty empirical evidence on how merit selection significantly influence employee performance (Abdolshah et al., 2018).

3. Methodology

The study adopted descriptive cross-sectional survey design to assist in testing the effects and relationship amongst study variables. The target population was 1354. The study unit of analysis was 142 public health institutions in Kisumu County. Stratified random sampling method adopted in distributing sample size in 142 public health institutions. The research utilized primary data collection by use of questionnaire which contain structured questions. Further, data was analyzed on the basis of returned complete questionnaires and conversion of five-point Likert scale while simple linear regression models are used in statistical analysis.

4. Results/ Discussion

The objective established the effect of merit selection on employee performance in public health institutions in Kisumu County. Conversely, the hypothesis was "Merit selection has no effect on employee performance."

Table 1: Effect of merit selection on employee performance

Model summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.636	0.405	0.403	0.51463
a. Predictor (constant): Merit selection				

ANOVA ^a						
Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
	Regression	59.24	1	59.24	223.693	<0.001
1	Residual	87.134	329	0.265		
	Total	146.374	330			
a. Response variable: Employee performance						
b. Regressor (constant): Merit selection						

Coefficients ^a						
Model		Unstandardized		Standardized	T	Sig
		Coefficients		Coefficients		
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
	Constant	1.209	0.147		8.208	<0.001
1	Merit selection	0.614	0.041	0.636	14.891	<0.001
a. Response variable: Employee performance						

Source: Research Data 2026

Table 5.4 presented the outcome of testing the effect of merit selection on employee performance. The model summary indicated a significant relationship, $R = 0.636$, with merit selection explaining 40.5% of the variance in employee performance ($R^2 = 0.405$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.403$). The ANOVA confirmed the model's statistical significance ($F = 223.693$, $p < 0.001$). The regression coefficient showed merit selection had a positive and significant effect on employee performance ($\beta = 0.614$, Beta = 0.636, $t = 14.891$, $p < 0.001$).

The above findings are comparable to Mustapha (2020) outcome who noted that merit selection help identify suitable employee needed for specific task at the right time. This means that organization will have competent and experienced employees which are easily trained and developed for succession planning purposes. Further comparison of both the direct and indirect influence of research outcomes are similar to Chenge (2022) who noted that merit selection has direct and indirect effect on employee performance.

The research findings are in line with social exchange theory assumption that the development of required skills, knowledge and behavioral competency is process of establishing merit selection strategies in the organization to enhance employee performance (Amahwa, 2021). In relation to social exchange theory, findings indicate that merit selection contribute significantly in attracting and developing employees towards high performance (Henry & Temtime, 2023).

5. Concussion

Merit selection was revealed to be a positive predictor of employee performance in public health institutions in Kisumu County, Kenya. This might be linked to the common belief that merit selection gives an organization opportunity to attract and recruit talented employees needed at specified time. It helps create a pool of human resources with varied competencies to respond to emerging employment issues and also improves employee performance. Therefore, the study confirmed that merit selection contributes towards improving employee performance. Otherwise, the corresponding hypothesis was rejected; that is merit selection has no effect on employee performance. These findings equally supported

social exchange theory, suggesting that an organization utilizing a fair merit selection process influences employee performance. The relationship is further enhanced when employees possess the requisite education, knowledge, experience and behavioral competencies. Therefore, merit selection contributes significantly in improving employee performance in public health institutions in Kisumu County, Kenya.

6. Future Scope

This research emphasized the establishment of the effect of merit selection on employee performance in Public Health Institutions in Kisumu County. The findings showed merit selection direct and indirect effect on employee performance. However, the upcoming studies should adopt longitudinal methods in new empirical studies. Even though a little bit expensive, complex and protracted but it might offer extra information on the diverse strategies of successful merit selection and employee performance.

The new research should focus on how employee performance is enhanced and measured in privately owned health institutions with large workforces and satellite facilities across counties or countries. This might reveal how the individually owned sector manages the influence of merit selection on employee performance. In conclusion, rather than relying solely on a multivariate regression approach to assess these relationships, future research could utilize various statistical methods to provide deeper insights into the correlations among the variables.

However, a five-point Likert scale was utilized to assess the research variables. An obvious weakness of the Likert scale is the closed nature of its response options, which forces participants to select from fixed alternatives. Participants may conceal their true thoughts by exhibiting preferred behaviors to avoid negative feedback. Similarly, their opinions might be influenced by the existing options rather than their true feelings. Therefore, the outcome might compromise the statistical significance of correlations among the research variables.

The research utilized a descriptive cross-sectional survey design, capturing data at a single point in time, which limits its ability to track longitudinal behavioral changes. Furthermore, because the study was restricted to a single county with unique regional characteristics, the findings may lack external validity. Although a randomized sampling method was implemented to minimize selection bias, there remains a risk that the sampled sub-sections coincidentally held predominantly negative attitudes toward the employer. This potential response bias could skew the data and yield a localized outcome that cannot be confidently generalized to other institutions.

Theory implication noted the requisite organization theory assumed that leaders are responsible in identify employees with suitable skills and knowledge that might be prepared for other roles in the organization through leadership development, talent management, management trainee programs, and career development. The assumption supports the research outcome which indicated statistical significance

effect on merit selection on employee performance in public health institutions in Kisumu County, Kenya.

The research outcome aligns with Social Exchange Theory, which posits that regular interaction among employees fosters the reciprocal exchange of knowledge and skills, thereby enhancing employee performance. This implies that merit selection process supports social exchange theory, suggesting that employees with relevant knowledge and skills have the ability to be developed for specific assignments to achieve effective performance (Amahwa, 2021). Moreover, the outcome aligns with the concept that merit-based selection helps attract the necessary experience and behavioral competencies required to achieve firm objectives (Henry & Temtime, 2023).

The study outcome also supports social exchange theory postulations that the social interaction between employees provide an opportunity for sharing practical skills and abilities that has effects of improving individual performance. Consequently, Malokani et al., (2023) posit that social exchange is related to individual pro-activeness in seeking knowledge hence succession planning will identify knowledge gap, available strength, shortage of human resource and place identified individuals in the program to modify their abilities towards development of specified skills and behaviours.

The study findings contribute to management and practice by clarifying the interplay between merit selection and employee performance. Precisely, management's ability to attract qualified employees and develop them for future job demands positively influences employee performance, thus reinforcing merit-based selection. Sangeetha (2021), merit selection involves an organization's careful planning to attract candidates with the required knowledge and experience through established standard procedures to fill vacancies arising from unexpected departures. Consequently, the results indicate that merit selection has a positive effect on employee performance in public health institutions within Kisumu County.

Managers might identify specific merit-based selection practices that ensure newly hired health workers possess the skills required for enhanced service delivery. Otherwise, the study's findings could inform managers of optimal merit-based approaches to eliminate bias and enhance the recruitment of employees with rare competencies, thereby securing a competitive advantage.

Additionally, the research aids policymakers in developing merit selection policies that guide the recruitment of candidates with required knowledge, skills, and experience to enhance performance across both national and county governments. These officials may provide guidance on establishing merit-based processes that reinforce recruiting personnel with the specific education and knowledge required for employee replacement, ensuring a consistent supply of relevant competencies. Therefore, a steady influx of a qualified workforce is ensured within the organization.

Kisumu County is expected to use the study findings to improve the retention of specialized medical officers and

reduce their migration to other local or international health institutions. The results can help establish a performance management program that provides constructive feedback, rewards high performers, and addresses underperformance.

Regarding methodology, the generalizability of the findings served as the foundation for the research design, although individual case analysis could further enrich the results. The study evaluated varying correlation strengths and differing statistical significances between the predictor and response variables. To ensure data credibility and minimize potential inaccuracies, the data collection methods, variable operationalization, and the validity and reliability of the measurement instruments were rigorously tested. Therefore, the research replication is affirmed. Data was gathered through questionnaires to guarantee respondent confidentiality, providing a distinct methodological approach compared to interviews or laboratory experiments.

Finally, for large-sample research, the drop-off and pick-up technique serves as an effective data collection method. Simple linear regression analysis was selected as the primary analytical tool due to its ability to evaluate the relationship and predictive power between variables. This method yielded statistically significant results that supported the study's hypotheses. Though conclusions were drawn from robust empirical evidence, it is worth noting that alternative analytical instruments might yield different statistical outcomes.

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