

EFFECT OF EMPLOYEE HUMAN RESOURCE GRIEVANCES ON MANAGEMENT DECISION MAKING AMONG PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES IN KENYA

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<https://doi.org/10.37602/IJSSMR.2025.8418>

ABSTRACT

Employee grievances are a common challenge in many organizations, and their management plays a critical role in shaping the decision-making processes of management, especially in public institutions such as universities. In Kenya, public universities face significant challenges related to employee grievances, which include complaints about promotions, compensation, workload, and workplace relationships. These unresolved grievances can lead to employee dissatisfaction, decreased productivity, and poor decision-making by management. This study investigates the effect of employee human resource grievances on management decision-making among public universities in Kenya. The study focuses on understanding how grievances impact the quality and nature of decisions made by university management and explores the strategies used to handle these grievances. The study was conducted across five public universities in Kenya, with a sample size of 214 participants, including human resource officers, departmental heads, and academic staff. Data was collected using structured questionnaires and analyzed using Pearson correlation and linear regression analysis via SPSS. The results revealed a strong positive relationship between employee grievances and management decision-making ($r = .642, p < 0.001$), indicating that unresolved grievances negatively impact the decision-making processes of management. This suggests that as grievances increase, the effectiveness and objectivity of management decisions are compromised, often leading to reactive rather than proactive decision-making. The primary objectives of the study were to: (1) assess the relationship between employee grievances and management decision-making, (2) identify the types of grievances most prevalent in public universities, and (3) explore how grievance handling mechanisms influence decision outcomes. The study concluded that proper grievance management mechanisms are essential to ensuring effective, fair, and transparent decision-making processes. The study recommends that public universities implement comprehensive grievance redress systems, provide ongoing training for staff on grievance handling, and use grievance patterns as feedback to improve institutional decision-making. Additionally, management should be proactive in addressing grievances to foster a healthy work environment that enhances overall institutional performance.

Keywords: Employee grievances, human resource management, management decision-making, public universities, grievance redress mechanisms, conflict resolution, organizational performance, institutional decision-making, employee satisfaction.

1.0 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Employee grievances have historically been fundamental to organizational management, with their proper settlement being crucial for sustaining harmonious labor relations and improving organizational performance. The Industrial Revolution historically signified a pivotal change in labor dynamics, resulting in the creation of official grievance processes to resolve worker discontent (Kaufman, 2008). The Wagner Act of 1935 in the United States formalized collective bargaining, establishing a systematic method for employees to express grievances (Gross, 1995). The United Kingdom's Employment Protection Act of 1975 underscored the necessity of resolving employee concerns to avert industrial disputes (Dickens & Hall, 2006).

In the international arena, numerous nations have acknowledged the importance of systematic grievance redress processes. India's Centralized Public Grievance Redress and Monitoring System (CPGRAMS), initiated in 2007, functions as an online platform for citizens to submit complaints against government entities, hence promoting openness and accountability (Government of India, 2021). The Employment Relations Act 2000 of New Zealand emphasizes the need of good faith interactions between employers and employees, facilitating effective grievance resolution to sustain productive employment relationships (New Zealand Legislation, 2000).

Africa has experienced an increasing focus on employee relations and grievance management, especially in public organizations. Research in Nigeria has underscored the essential function of grievance procedures in improving employee satisfaction and organizational engagement (Adebayo & Ogunsina, 2011). Public universities in South Africa have encountered issues concerning employee grievances, with studies demonstrating that proficient grievance management is crucial for the retention and performance of academic staff (Ngobeni & Bezuidenhout, 2011).

In Kenya, public universities have undergone substantial growth in the last twenty years, resulting in heightened student enrollment and a concomitant increase in faculty and staff (Commission for University Education [CUE], 2020). This rise has, nonetheless, been accompanied by problems, including resource restrictions, infrastructural deficiencies, and human resource management concerns. The management of employee grievances has become a crucial topic necessitating focus. A study conducted by Oyigo and Ntabo (2019) in Nakuru County indicated that the implementation of grievance handling processes accounted for 31.9% of conflict management in public universities, highlighting the significance of organized grievance procedures.

Despite the acknowledged significance of grievance management, a gap persists in comprehending the precise influence of employee grievances on management decision-making processes in Kenyan public universities. Although several studies have examined the correlation between grievance handling processes and conflict management (Oyigo & Ntabo, 2019), there exists a paucity of research investigating the direct impact of these grievances on managerial decisions and policy development. Moreover, records reveal that between 2013 and 2018, public universities in Western Kenya represented 29.76% of employee unrest incidents, underscoring the prevalence of issues within these institutions (Anyango, Nyambuga, & Adams, 2018).

Rectifying this deficiency is crucial, since unaddressed or inadequately handled grievances may result in heightened staff attrition, lowered morale, and compromised organizational efficacy. By comprehending the impact of employee grievances on management decision-making, university administrators can formulate more effective methods to improve employee satisfaction and institutional efficacy. This study seeks to examine the impact of employee human resource grievances on management decision-making within public universities in Kenya, offering insights that may guide policy and practice in higher education institutions.

2.0 OBJECTIVE

To investigate the influence of employee human resource grievances on management decision-making among public universities in Kenya.

2.1 Hypothesis

H₀: Employee human resource grievances have no significant effect on management decision-making in public universities in Kenya.

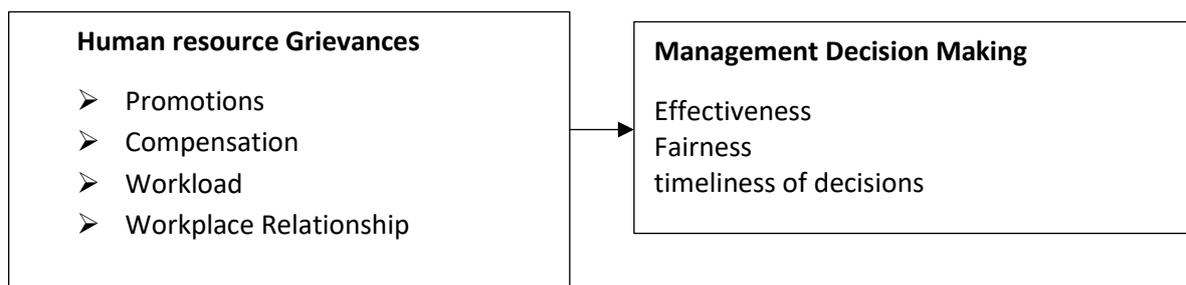
H₁: Employee human resource grievances significantly affect management decision-making in public universities in Kenya.

2.2 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study explores the relationship between employee human resource grievances and management decision-making within public universities in Kenya as shown in figure below.

Independent Variable

Dependent Variable



The framework delineates the principal variables pertinent to this relationship and demonstrates their interactions, which affect organizational outcomes. The independent variable in this study is Employee Grievances, encompassing aspects such as promotions, remuneration, workload, and workplace relationships. These grievances are anticipated to affect the Management Decision-Making process, the dependent variable. The paradigm posits that unresolved or inadequately managed employee grievances result in reactive decision-making by management, hence impacting the overall efficacy, equity, and promptness of decisions.

The Grievance Handling Mechanisms serve as a mediating variable, affecting the intensity of the link between employee grievances and management decision-making. Efficient grievance

systems can alleviate the adverse effects of complaints by guaranteeing that employee issues are resolved swiftly and equitably, resulting in better informed and strategic decision-making. Additional contextual factors, including company culture and management style, may serve as moderating elements, either amplifying or diminishing the correlation between grievances and management decisions.

3.0 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is grounded in the following theories:

Equity Theory (Adams, 1963) posits that employees evaluate their inputs and outcomes in relation to those of their peers. Grievances frequently emerge from perceived inequity, prompting management to implement corrective measures to reestablish fairness. Contingency Theory posits that organizational decisions are contingent upon the specific environment and circumstances. Employee grievances, being context-dependent, require flexible and adaptable management solutions. Psychological Contract Theory asserts that unarticulated expectations between employees and employers, when breached, result in unhappiness and grievances. These factors, in turn, affect management's decision-making on the restoration of trust.

3.1 Literature Review

Efficient administration of employee grievances is essential for preserving organizational cohesion and improving performance. Ignoring such issues may lead to diminished productivity, increased absenteeism, and indiscipline, ultimately adversely impacting organizational performance (Nytse & Zamani, 2024). Conversely, swiftly addressing employee issues enhances workplace relationships, team cohesion, and loyalty, resulting in increased productivity.

In Kenyan public universities, conflict management strategies substantially affect staff performance. Muthoni and Muathe (2021) conducted a study with 160 participants from designated public universities in Kenya. Their findings indicated a robust positive correlation among negotiation, mediation, and collaboration and employee performance. Nonetheless, the avoidance approach was determined to adversely affect performance. The study determined that utilizing effective conflict management tactics improves employee performance, whereas avoidance intensifies conflicts and reduces productivity.

Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) techniques, such as mediation, negotiation, arbitration, and conciliation, are recognized as useful instruments for crisis management in public universities. Getanda and Miroga (2024) evaluated the impact of these methods on crisis management in specific public universities in Kenya. Their research identified favorable associations between each ADR mechanism and effective crisis management, indicating that the adoption of ADR procedures can substantially mitigate conflicts and improve organizational stability.

Moreover, the existence of systematic grievance resolution procedures enhances efficient conflict management. Oyigo and Ntabo (2019) analyzed public universities in Nakuru County, Kenya, revealing that grievance collecting systems accounted for 30.5% and grievance handling processes for 31.9% in conflict management. The study determined that clear and

accessible grievance resolution systems are crucial for conflict resolution and enhancing organizational performance.

Although current literature highlights the significance of proficient grievance management and dispute resolution tactics in improving employee performance and organizational stability, notable gaps persist. Firstly, there is a paucity of studies examining the direct influence of employee grievances on management decision-making processes in Kenyan public universities. Secondly, the majority of research focus on the results of grievance management rather than the procedural elements and their efficacy. Finally, there is a necessity for more contemporary empirical data to accurately represent the current dynamics and issues encountered by public universities in Kenya concerning grievance handling and its impact on decision-making.

4.0 METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a descriptive research design to investigate the effect of employee human resource grievances on management decision-making among public universities in Kenya. Descriptive design was suitable because it allows for detailed assessment of current events, opinions, and conditions as they exist without manipulation (Kothari, 2014). The target population included human resource officers, departmental heads, and academic staff across five selected public universities in Kenya. Stratified random sampling was used to ensure representation from different departments and administrative levels. The sample size was determined using Yamane's (1967) formula:

$$n = N / (1 + Ne^2),$$

where n is the sample size, N is the population, and e is the margin of error (0.05). With an estimated population of 460 staff members, a sample of 214 respondents was selected.

Primary data was collected using structured questionnaires, which comprised closed-ended items on a five-point Likert scale ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree." The instrument included sections on demographic information, types and nature of employee grievances, their frequency, and the influence on management decisions. The questionnaire was piloted with 20 respondents from a non-sampled university to test for reliability and validity. Cronbach's alpha was used to test internal consistency, and all key variables exceeded the acceptable threshold of 0.7, indicating high reliability. Content validity was confirmed through expert review by two HR professionals and two university lecturers in human resource management.

Data was analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies, means, and standard deviations were used to summarize data. Inferential statistics, specifically Pearson correlation and linear regression analysis, were employed to test relationships between variables. The dependent variable was management decision-making, while the independent variable was employee grievances (e.g., complaints on promotion, remuneration, and working conditions). The results were presented in tables and figures, and interpretation was supported by a narrative discussion. Triangulation was applied by including insights from a few key informant interviews conducted with senior HR officers to supplement and validate the quantitative findings.

5.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study sought to examine the effect of employee human resource grievances on management decision-making in public universities in Kenya. Data was collected from 214 respondents using structured questionnaires, and responses were analyzed using Pearson correlation and linear regression analysis with SPSS version 26. The aim was to assess the strength and direction of the relationship between employee grievances and the effectiveness of management decision-making processes.

Table 1: Correlation between Employee Grievances and Management Decision-Making

Variables	Management Decision-Making	Employee Grievances
Management Decision-Making 1		
Employee Grievances	.642**	1
Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
N	214	214

Note: $p < 0.01$ (2-tailed); Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level

The correlation results in Table 1 indicate a strong positive and statistically significant relationship between employee grievances and management decision-making ($r = .642$, $p < .001$). This suggests that as employee grievances increase in frequency or intensity, there is a corresponding impact on how decisions are made by university management. The results imply that grievances, when not addressed proactively, may force institutions into reactive decision-making, sometimes compromising objectivity and policy consistency.

The findings are consistent with those of Muthoni and Muathe (2021), who found that unresolved conflicts and grievances negatively affect institutional performance and employee morale, thereby influencing managerial choices. The current results reinforce the critical need for structured grievance handling mechanisms, as highlighted by Getanda and Miroga (2024), who emphasized the role of dispute resolution mechanisms in shaping organizational decisions. The findings also support the theoretical postulates of the Equity Theory, which posits that perceived inequities, when left unresolved, affect employee behavior and institutional harmony. These results underline the necessity for management in public universities to institutionalize clear and transparent grievance redress systems to enhance informed, fair, and strategic decision-making processes.

6.0 CONCLUSION

The findings of this study underscore the significant influence of employee human resource grievances on management decision-making processes within public universities in Kenya. The positive and statistically significant correlation between the two variables indicates that unresolved or poorly managed grievances can directly impact the quality, timeliness, and

consistency of decisions made by institutional leadership. When employees express dissatisfaction regarding issues such as promotions, remuneration, workload, or workplace relationships, and these issues are not addressed adequately, it creates a climate of discontent that not only affects morale but also undermines the authority and effectiveness of management decisions. This study confirms that grievance mechanisms are not merely tools for conflict resolution but essential components of strategic leadership. It further reveals that grievances are often symptomatic of deeper systemic issues, and their neglect can lead to reactionary, rather than proactive, management responses.

7.0 RECOMMENDATION

Based on the above findings, the study recommends that public universities in Kenya should institutionalize comprehensive grievance redress mechanisms that are transparent, accessible, and timely. Human resource departments should be empowered with both policy and capacity to handle grievances efficiently while ensuring fairness and confidentiality. Additionally, there is a need for continuous sensitization of staff and management on grievance handling policies, ensuring that both parties understand the procedures and trust the outcomes. Universities should also incorporate feedback from grievance patterns into strategic planning and decision-making frameworks, enabling them to proactively address systemic issues before they escalate. Finally, integrating employee voice through regular surveys, open forums, and grievance audits can serve as an early warning system to guide better-informed and inclusive management decisions.

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