

THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF HUMANITIES & SOCIAL STUDIES

Strategic Factors Affecting Recruitment of Academic Staff in Public Universities: A Case of Egerton University, Njoro Kenya

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Abstract:

The recruitment of employees with the right skills and abilities helps an organization achieve its strategic goals efficiently. For this reason, organizations should consider strategic factors that are likely to affect their recruitment process. Egerton University has had difficulty in attracting a pool of applicants in some fields such as Engineering, Computer Science, Economics, Health Sciences, Agricultural Economics and Commerce as highlighted in its strategic plan. This has contributed to shortage of staff in the academic categories within these disciplines. Past studies have not examined strategic factors influencing recruitment of academic staff in the said disciplines. The purpose of this study was to determine the strategic factors and how they affect recruitment of academic staff in public universities. The study was conducted in Egerton University. The sample size was 30 respondents comprising of 15 chairpersons of departments from the six areas of study and 15 members of the University Recruitment Committee. Primary data was collected using questionnaires and secondary data included internal documents such as Egerton University's 10-year Strategic Plan and Egerton University Scheme of Service. Statistical Package for Social Sciences was used for analysing data and results presented using table and graphs. Descriptive statistics and percentages were used to summarize the data. The results indicated that the strategic factors studied affect recruitment of academic staff at Egerton University, and the most important were salary, terms and conditions, presence of facilities, geographical area, and institutional reputation. The study makes recommendations to management practitioners and areas for further research.

Keywords: Recruitment, strategic factors

1. Introduction

The level of performance of any organization depends on the quality and quantity of its human resource, which depends on the effectiveness of its recruitment function. As such, recruitment is one of the most crucial roles of the human resource professionals. Over the years, organizations have developed and followed recruitment strategies to hire the best talent for their organization and to utilize their resources optimally. Therefore, a successful recruitment strategy should be well planned and practical to attract more and good talent to apply in the organization. Cloete (1993) states that the process of recruitment must be undertaken with a view of obtaining the services of people of quality.

Strategic human resource management plays an important role in the recruitment process of an organization. According to Armstrong (1998), strategic human resource management is fundamentally about matching human resources to the strategic and operational needs of the organization, and ensuring full utilization of the resources.

According to Fletcher (2009), the recruitment and subsequent selection of new employees are the most important decisions any company can make. Employees are the fuel that keeps an organization running and ensuring that the best people are hired, involves a firm understanding of how to make that happen. The recruitment process is however affected by several strategic factors which need to be considered while undertaking the process. These strategic factors can be internal or external and every organization has a set of unique strategic factors that affect its process. Effective recruitment practices can mean the difference between an organization's success and failure. Hiring people with the right skills or the highest levels of those skills leads to positive economic outcomes for the organization. Hiring a person with the wrong set of skills can lead to disaster for both the person and the organization (Catano *et al*, 2010).

According to the Egerton University Recruitment Procedures (2008), the recruitment process of the University begins from the department in need of staff. The chairpersons of departments are mandated with the process which includes forecasting and identifying specific needs within the department, creating a list of attributes and qualifications that are required for a particular position and forwarding them to the human resource section, which is mandated with the process of recruitment and selection of staff.

Ideally, in determining the recruitment strategy for a particular position, cognizance should be taken of whether there is likely to be suitable staff within the institution who have the competencies associated with the position. Should such suitable staff exist the post should be advertised internally. Where there are few possible internal suitable individuals, the relevant selection committee should decide on whether it should interview those individuals to assess their suitability or consideration of both internal and external applicants for the position should take place. Where there are no suitable internal candidates, the position will be advertised externally. However, despite all these impressive structures and procedures in place, for a long time, challenges facing certain disciplines like Engineering, Computer Science, Economics, Health Sciences, Agricultural Economics and Commerce remains unabated. The purpose of this study, therefore is to determine the factors contributing to this state of affairs in the affected disciplines.

2. Review of Literature

The processes of recruitment and selection take place within a framework of external and internal influences. External direction, through legislation and published codes of practice, suggests that approaches need to be standardized. However, factors in both external and internal contexts result in variations in both philosophy and practice (Beardwell 2004). Resourcing plan, as one of the components of resourcing strategy put forward by Cappelli (2000) suggests that organizations should 'Simply get better at recruiting' and incorporate policies for making the organization an 'employer of choice' by providing advantageous terms and conditions of service, career opportunities, scope for using and developing skills and expertise that are generous or attractive enough to attract employees away from competitors. Balter *et al.* (2013) suggests that, among exogenous factors mentioned in previous research works by several researchers, as strategic factors affecting recruitment of academic staff, rural or remote location was the most frequently cited reason. Other limitations mentioned include a small pool of candidates in certain specialties, and resource limitations both in terms of staff time, and budget constraints. According to Sheehan *et al.* (1997), recruitment is affected by the whole employment package (the rewards and benefits of the job) relative to other employment. These include pay and fringe benefits, intrinsic aspects of the job (e.g., for academics, academic and research), job security, work organization, autonomy, progression, family-friendly practices, congeniality of colleagues and the working environment. The more attractive the overall package, the more likely it will attract applicants.

With regard to specific elements of the package which affect recruitment and retention, those considered by higher education institution human resources departments to be causing most problems were: uncompetitive salaries, location specific issues (such as a rural or expensive area) job insecurity from fixed-term contracts; workload; and poor promotion possibilities (Bett, 1999). Pay levels were the main reason cited by human resource departments for recruitment and retention difficulties.

The conceptual framework focused on the strategic factors and how they affect recruitment of academic staff.

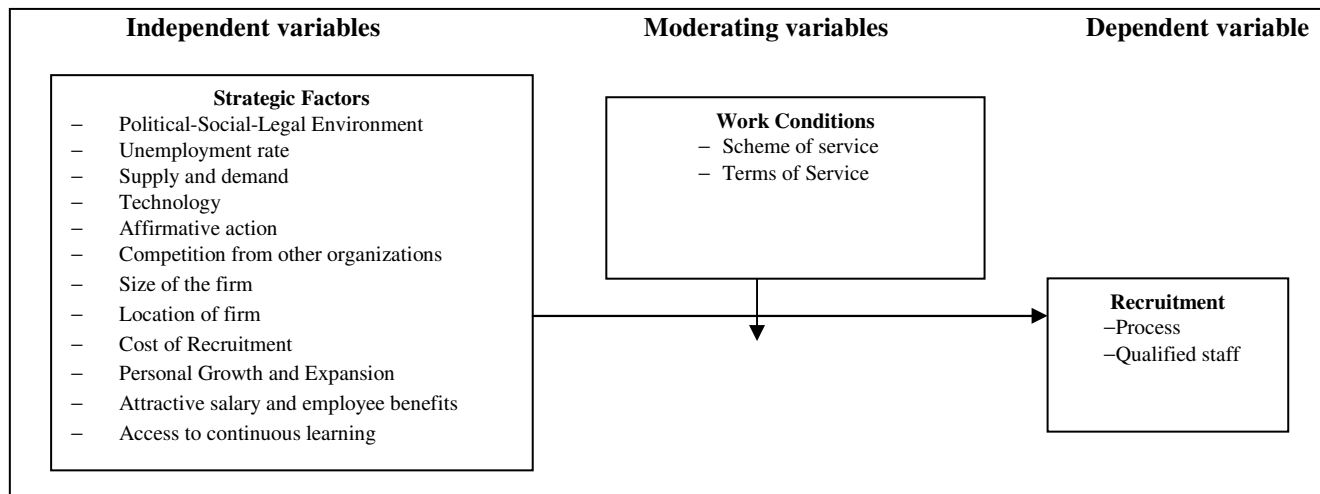


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of strategic factors affecting recruitment
Source: own conceptualization

3. Objective of the Study

The main objective of the study was as follows:

- (i) To determine the strategic factors and how they affect recruitment of academic staff in public universities.

4. Research Question

What are the strategic factors affecting recruitment of academic staff at Egerton University?

5. Research Methodology

The study employed a cross-sectional survey research design by use of questionnaires. It involved collecting information from the chairpersons of the departments in the six areas of study at Egerton University and the University Recruitment Committee within the

Human Resource department and top management involved in the recruitment of academic staff. Questionnaires were administered to the two categories of staff i.e. the chairpersons of departments and members of the university staff recruitment committee, to identify the main issues and concerns for universities in relation to strategic recruitment.

5.1. Sample Design & Target Population

The target population was the chairpersons of departments in the identified areas of study and the recruitment committee members of Egerton University. A census was carried out, in which all chairpersons of departments, consisting of 30 respondents from the six areas of study interest participated; 15 chairpersons of departments from the six areas of interest: Engineering, Computer Science, Economics, Health Sciences, Agricultural Economics and Commerce and the 15 members of the University Recruitment Committee comprising of staff in the Human Resource department and the University top management. One set of questionnaires was distributed to all the 15 chairpersons of departments from the six areas and another set to the 15 members of the University Recruitment Committee.

Primary data were obtained through questionnaires. The questionnaires had questions relating to recruitment process and strategic factors considered during recruitment. Other information sought included demographics such as personal, academic and professional qualifications of the respondents. In addition to primary sources, secondary sources included internal documents, and relevant resource documents of the University's Ten Year Strategic Plan and the academic staff scheme of service were used.

5.2. Area of Study

The study was undertaken at Egerton University which is one of the twenty two public universities in Kenya. It is located in the Rift Valley province, Njoro District, 180 kms, North-West of Nairobi and 30kms from Nakuru town on the Njoro-Narok road. It is situated at an agricultural landscape of the Rift Valley highlands next to the Mau forest at an altitude of 2250m above the sea level. It has a staff population of about 1942 out of which 536 are academic staff and a student population of about 15000.

5.3. Statistical Tools

Data were processed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive analysis was used to analyse the collected data and presented by use of tables, graphs and percentages. Kruskal Wallis analysis of ranks was used to determine the most important strategic factors affecting recruitment in the different areas of study.

6. Analysis and Interpretation

The characteristics of the respondents formed a basis for determining how close the sample replicated the population and whether the researcher was actually reaching the target audience. The demographic characteristics considered included; gender, age, education level, designation in the university. These were disaggregated into two categories; the chairs of departments and the Egerton University Recruitment Committee that formed the sample of the study.

Results indicated that majority of chair persons of departments (90.9%) were male and only (9.1%) were headed by female chairs. The age variable was classified into 28-37, 38-47, and 48-60 and above 60. The results also indicated that the majority (72.8%) of the chair persons of departments were between the age of 38 and 60 years old. This wide age bracket may be an advantage to the department during recruitment since it would give a chance to varied experiences of the best recruitment practices that would assist the departments.

Regarding the designation of the respondents, Senior lecturers formed majority of the Chairs of Department (54.5%) while 36.4% were lecturers and 9.1% Assistant Lecturers. The findings also indicate that 27.3% of CODs of the departments under study, had worked for the University for a period of between 16 - 20 years, 18.2% had worked for the University for a period of between 0 – 5 years, 6 – 10 years, 11 – 15 years, and over 20 years, respectively. This indicated that the university preferred staff with experience as a Chairpersons of department.

Findings also indicated that majority of the members of the recruitment committee (61.5%) were male and 38.5% female. In relation to their age, majority of the members of the recruitment committee (92.3%) were between the age of 38 and 60. This implied that there was diversity in terms of age that would also possibly be reflected in making sound decisions during recruitment of academic staff. Possibly the younger staff would suggest alternative ways while the older staff in the committee would guide on experience. The results also indicated that the majority of the Recruitment Committee members (62%) were administrators while 38% were Associate professors.

Further, the findings showed that most of the members of the University Recruitment Committee were PhD (53.8%) and Masters (23.1%) degree holders. Others (15.4%) were Bachelor's degree holders while one (7.7%) was a CPS (K) holder. This indicated that very high level of academic qualifications was upheld by Egerton University in constituting individuals charged with the important role of recruiting academic staff. It also implied that the individuals also had the relevant experience, skills competencies and knowledge with regard to role performance. In addition, the findings showed that most (53.8%) of the members of the University Recruitment Committee had worked for the University for over 20 years, followed by 23.1% who had worked for the University for between 11 – 15 years.

The results also provided information on a series of attributes possessed by the individuals involved in strategic recruitment. These attributes contributed majorly to the recruitment of Academic Staff at Egerton University since they gave insight on the terms of service and experience which could be a determinant of the expected outcome of the recruitment process.

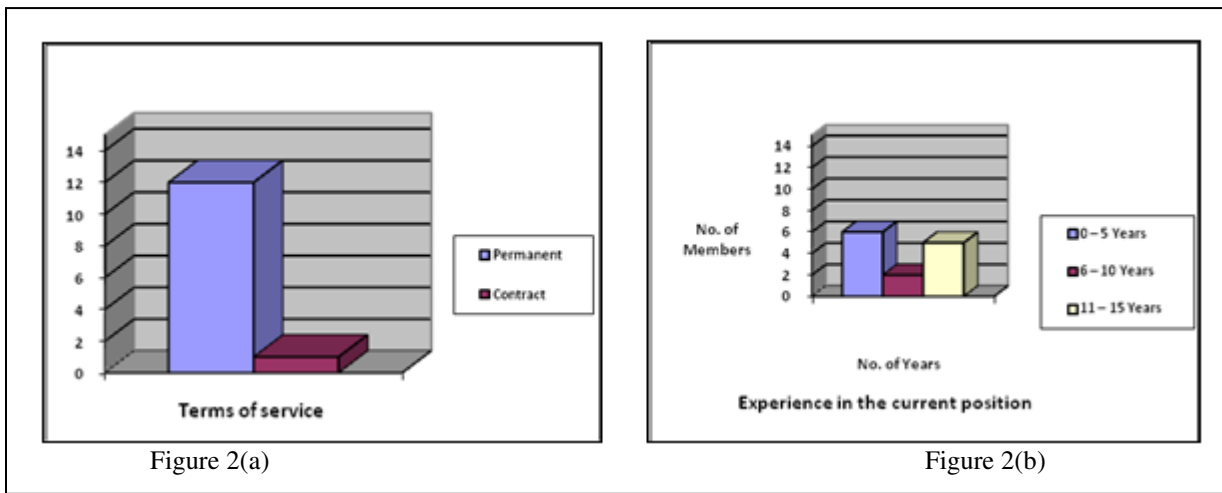


Figure 2: Employment Information

From figures 2 (a) and (b) above, it was clear that 12 out of the 13 members of the recruitment committee members served on permanent terms while one was on contract. It was also depicted that 6 out of 13 had served in their current positions for a period of not more than five years, 2 out of 13 had served for a period between six and ten years and 5 out of 13 had served for between eleven and fifteen years. None of the respondents in this category had served for more than fifteen years.

The size of the department formed a basis for determining the number of academic staff required in a particular department based on the student population to determine whether there was a shortage or not.

		CODs	
		N=11	%
No. of Students	1 – 50 Students	4	36.3
	51 – 100 Students	3	27.3
	101 – 150 Students	3	27.3
	Above 200 Students	1	9.1

Table 1: Departmental Information

The results in Table 1 above highlighted the number of students admitted in the departments under study per year. Results indicated that most of the departments (90.9%) admitted less than 150 students per year.

6.1. Strategic Recruitment Practices

A research by the Scottish Council for Research in Education, University of Glasgow and Nottingham Trent University (2003) indicated that, for stakeholders, best practice in recruitment implies that Institutions should recruit from the widest possible pool, using open and fair advertising and publicity of posts. All staff involved in recruitment should have training in equal opportunities following national guidelines. It is important that policies and mechanisms are in place to provide baseline information about applications and recruitment so that the impact of policies can be assessed and acted upon. The research also indicated that a successful recruitment process must involve departmental staff in recruitment procedures and hold regular reviews of staff to translate part-time staff to permanent contracts.

The results indicated that all (100%) Chairpersons of Departments were involved in the recruitment process. They also indicated that majority (72.7%) of the departments received less than seven job applications whenever advertised while 27.3% received between 8 – 15 job applications. This clearly showed that either the skills sought for were not readily available in the market or the potential job applicants did not get information on the available vacancies leading to the very small pool of applicants. It was expected that for a vacancy that is advertised nationally, the pool of applicants would be very large, giving a wide variety of applicants to shortlist from. The small pool of applicants (less than seven (7) applicants) in most of the departments, led to a very difficult choice in short-listing candidates as revealed in the results. Majority (81.8%) of the interviewed departments shortlisted less than seven candidates per advertisement while 18.2% shortlisted between 8 – 15 applicants per advertisement. Results continued to reveal that all (100%) of the departments interviewed less than seven candidates. This meant that some of the candidates shortlisted did not turn up for the interview, since even the two (2) departments that shortlisted upto 15 applicants still interviewed less than seven candidates.

The results revealed that after short-listing, majority (61.5%) of candidates were given between 2 weeks and one month to prepare for interviews while 38.5% were given less than 2 weeks to prepare for the same. This may have a positive as well as a negative implication. Positive in the sense that they would have sufficient time to prepare and negative in the sense that due to the length of time and scarcity of these skills, the applicants may find other opportunities and fail to turn up for the interviews. The findings continued to show that majority (46.2%) of candidates were informed of the results within a period of between two weeks and one

month while 38.5% said they were informed within a period of 0 – 2 weeks. A few (15.4%) said that the candidates were informed in a period of between 1 – 3 months. The disparity, according to responses from the human resource, was caused by exogenous factors such as budgetary constraints which led to delay in replying to the candidates. A quick response after interview may have a positive impact on the applicant while a delayed response may have a negative implication since the candidate may end up looking for a job elsewhere and may actually not turn up for the job. All (100%) of the Recruitment Committee members indicated that the candidates were informed of the decisions in writing.

The next step was to determine the strategic recruitment technique used by the University. The open advertisement technique which, according to majority of Chairs of Departments, was transparent and fair to all potential applicants was affirmed to be the most appropriate to hire desirable academic staff.

		CODs N=11%	Recruitment Committee N=13 %
Method of Recruitment Used at Egerton University	Open Advertisement	72.7	92.3
	Internal Advertisement	27.3	7.7
Selection Process Applied at Egerton University	Individual Interviews	9.1	15.4
	Panel Interviews	90.9	84.6

Table 2: CODs Responses Related to Strategic Recruitment Practices

Results on table 2 above indicated that majority (72.7%) of the Chairpersons of Department also indicated that they prefer the Open Advertisement method of recruitment as opposed to other methods. This would go a long way in attracting a large pool of applicants as opposed to inbreeding which may not yield desired results. The findings also indicated that, according to majority of CODs, Egerton University mainly applied Panel interviews (90.9%) while recruiting their staff and also sometimes conducted individual interviews (9.1%). According to majority of the University recruitment committee members, the open advertisement technique was the most preferred selection technique.

Results continue to indicate that the Recruitment Committee of Egerton used the Open Advertisement method of recruitment for Academic staff as indicated by 92.3% of the respondents. This implied that the Open Advertisement method of recruitment was the most popular and most preferred method. From the above findings, it could be seen that Egerton University mainly applied Panel interviews (84.6%) while recruiting their staff and also conducted individual interviews (15.4%).

In examining whether there are any differences in recruitment practices across the six areas of study, Kruskal Wallis test was used. The Kruskal Wallis Test results indicated that there was no significant difference in the academic staff recruitment practices used in the six areas of study as indicated by the P-value of 0.439. Thus the study concluded that the recruitment process was the same for all the six areas of study at Egerton University.

Although the use of search committees was not widespread, the university was encouraging departments to carry out market research on recruitment in their subject area and to use their networks to identify potential recruits.

Results also revealed that 45.5% of CODs, thought that the evaluation of skills needed for the department then recruiting pre-screened candidates was the most appropriate strategy for recruiting academic staff in the departments. Accepting job applications sent randomly and keeping them in a data bank awaiting a possible opening (27.3%) was second. Waiting until a vacancy arises and then hastily recruit the next available person(s) in order to fill the position (18.2%) came third, and headhunting for skilled staff (9.0%) was last.

Results also revealed that the recruitment committee (100%) viewed evaluation of skills needed and recruiting prescreened candidates as the most ideal strategy for acquiring the best talent in the market. The most common strategy (81.8%) used in the recruitment of academic staff was acceptance of job applications sent randomly and kept in a data bank awaiting possible opening. Evaluation of skills needed for the department then recruiting pre-screened candidates (63.6%) was the next most common strategy. Waiting until a vacancy arose and then hastily recruit the next available person(s) in order to fill the position (27.2%) was third while headhunting for skilled staff (9.0%) was least used.

Further results revealed that 27.3% CODs felt that recruitment done according to need was the best recommendation for making recruitment in the university to be strategic, while only 9.1% each, felt that accepting applications from people, identifying human capital needs, avoiding stagnation of staff in one job group and adopting proper HR planning processes was what would make recruitment in the university to be strategic. Results also revealed that 23% Recruitment Committee members recommended improved terms of service as the best recommendation for making recruitment in the university to be strategic, while 30.8% said that the institution should headhunt suitable qualified professionals, and one respondent (7.7%), said that career progression should be smoothened to accompany experience in academic.

Janet *et al.* (2003) suggests that any proposed strategies and policies will have to recognize the need to balance and accommodate certain tensions in higher education. They should also take account of the diversity within the sector, within individual higher education institutions and within departments. Staffs in higher education demonstrate diversity in their strengths, in their contributions to their institution, and in their individual aspirations.

6.2. Strategic Factors Affecting Recruitment of Academic Staff

According to the CODs the strategic factors that affected recruitment of academic staff in the six areas under study included the strengths in terms of factors that the University had to its advantage that that would attract candidates and the weaknesses that the university had and could improve on.

The study revealed that most CODs felt that, the factors that affected a candidate's decision to accept or decline a job offer included salary, opportunities for family members and terms and conditions of service were the most important followed by geographical area /location, careers opportunities, facilities, cost of living, job description, institution reputation, job security, hours of work, while the least were, housing, serene environment and size of the organization in that order. Generally, from the results, it was clear that most (60.4%) chairpersons of departments either agreed or strongly agreed that most of the strategic factors above affected a candidate's decision to accept or decline a job offer while only a few (21.9%) either disagreed or strongly disagreed. On the other hand, according to the recruitment committee, the strategic recruitment factors also included strengths and weaknesses that the university had in recruitment of academic staff in the six areas of study.

Results from previous research by Hiltrop (1999) identified equality of opportunity, flexibility, opportunities for entry, promotion from within policies, incentives, career development and guidance, salaries, competition from non-university employers, reputation in research or in quality of students as the major factors for satisfactory recruitment of teaching staff in departments in institutions of higher learning. Other results indicate that there are very few other factors that attract applicants to the organization/department for academic job opportunities. Few indicated that applicants look at good reputation of the institution.

Regarding career progression, most CODs reported that their departments had a career progression plan for academic staff compared to those that did not. This career progression plan was meant to assist academic staff to set future goals for progression in their careers. People were often attracted to a particular job by opportunities for career progression through learning and training to match life goals. The career progression plan in most departments was sufficient to help the departments achieve their future expected growth. Career development often had opportunistic components. Institutional change and restructuring could provide new career opportunities. The outcome could also be negative if expansion and mergers brought an influx of new staff perceived as damaging promotion prospects

6.3. Terms of Service Offered to Academic Staff Employed in Departments

The results below indicate terms of service offered to the academic staff employed in the department under study in the University. The information collected shows the number of academic staff under different terms of service. Terms of service was one of the important internal factors that a candidate considered before deciding to take up a job offer because of job security.

No. of Staff.	Permanent and Pensionable	Contract	Part-Time
0 – 7 staff	6 (54.5%)	9 (81.8%)	7 (63.6%)
8-15 Staff	3 (27.3%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (18.2%)
16 – 23 staff	2 (18.2%)	1 (9.1%)	1 (9.1%)
Above 30 staff	0 (0.0%)	1 (9.1%)	1 (9.1%)

Table 3: Terms of Service for Candidates as reported by Chairpersons of Departments

From the results given in Table 3, it was clear that most of the departments had their staff employed on permanent terms. This was clearly seen in the fact that most (nine out of eleven) chairpersons of departments reported that they had less than seven (7) employees on either part-time or contract while five out of eleven had between eight and twenty-two staff on permanent terms.

Further results indicated that majority of Assistant Lecturers in Computer Science and Engineering Departments were employed on permanent basis while those in Commerce, Agricultural Economics, Economics and Health Sciences Departments were employed on Contract basis. Lecturers, Senior Lecturers, Associate Professors and Professors were recruited on permanent terms in all the areas of study. The terms of service of the academic staff may have influenced the job seekers decision to take up a job offer since permanent terms guaranteed job security while contractual terms did not.

6.4. Challenges Faced by Departments in Recruitment of Academic Staff

The study also examined the challenges that Departments face in the recruitment of academic staff in the areas under study. These challenges represent the weaknesses and threats that the university faced. They included the challenges that affected departments in acquiring academic staff, the opportunities available to address these challenges, the strengths in terms of factors that the University had to its advantage that would attract candidates and the weaknesses that the university had and could improve on.

Results revealed the order in which the departments faced challenges while trying to recruit academic staff. According to the results from the study, availability of exact skill set required was found to be the main challenge facing the departments during recruitment, followed by market competition, geographical location, compensation, source of recruitment, adaptability to the organization, and technological changes. Previous research by Metcalf *et al.* (2005) show that Pay and promotion, lack of academic qualifications among applicants as major challenges facing recruitment in computer science, engineering, economics, commerce and medicine. Unfortunately, majority of the CODs, felt that the university was not doing enough to address the challenges encountered in the recruitment of academic staff.

6.5. Most Important Strategic Factors affecting Recruitment

The researcher also sought to determine the most important strategic factors influencing recruitment of academic staff. The test conducted for objective two was used to rank the strategic factors in order of importance as seem in Table 4 below.

Recruitment Committee and CODs Strategic Factor	N=24	Mean
Salary	24	27.25
Terms and Conditions	24	24.50
Facilities	24	19.25
Geographical area /Location	24	19.25
Institution reputation	24	18.25
Opportunities for family members	24	16.25
Career progression prospects	24	14.25
Cost of Living	24	13.5
Serene environment	24	13
Job Security	24	10.5
Housing	24	9
Job description	24	8
Hours of Work	24	5.5
Size/Structure of Organization	24	4.5

Table 4: Most Important Strategic Factors affecting Recruitment

Table 4 above shows that the most important strategic factors affecting recruitment at Egerton University were salary with a mean of (27.25), followed by terms and conditions (24.25), and presence of facilities (19.25), geographical area (19.25), and institutional reputation (18.25). The results were significant at the $\alpha = 0.05$ level of significance, as the p value = $0.165 \geq 0.05$, hence we failed to reject the null hypothesis that the CODs in the six areas of study and the recruitment committee posted different results. Thus we concluded that for the CODs in the six areas of study and the recruitment committee, the above strategic factors were the most important in influencing recruitment at Egerton University in the order presented on the table.

Previous research by Bellamy *et al.* (2003), in universities in Australia, showed that the most important strategic factors in recruitment of academic staff were flexibility, autonomy, academic, research, and the 'community of scholars. A study of Nigerian Higher Education Institutes found the most important strategic factor affecting recruitment was an internal factor i.e. pay (Mallam, 1994). The other strategic factors (in declining order of importance) were: supervision, the work on the present job, the job in general, co-workers, and the commitment of the respondents to the institution at which they worked.

7. Conclusions and Recommendations

From the study, the recruitment practices used in the six areas of study were the same as concluded by the CODs in the six areas of study and the recruitment committee as the respondents, the strategic factors adopted in the study all affected the recruitment of academic staff in public universities.

The study also concluded that salary, terms of service and facilities (internal factors), geographical location, institutional reputation (external factors), were ranked as the most important strategic factors affecting the recruitment of academic staff at Egerton University and that these factors affected recruitment in the same way in all the six area of study.

The study recommended that the University takes the process of staff recruitment as an important exercise by ensuring that the prospective staff were given adequate salaries, proper working conditions, adequate facilities and also do extensive marketing of the university and its programmes in order to boost its reputation, to enable them look forward to working with the University.

The study also recommended that the University could consider adopting a different academic staff recruitment practices such as exploiting internal advertisement to give an opportunity to qualified staff members to take up these positions, especially in the six areas of study in order to improve on its pool of academic staff in these areas. The University could also improve on its career progression plan by developing a scheme of service which ensured proper career progression and succession plan and which strategically build into the University's Strategic plan. The study also recommended that academic staff with the potential of making the difference in terms of teaching and research could be considered for permanent appointments. This would significantly improve their job satisfaction and commitment to the university.

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