Employee Age and Job Performance: A Case of Academic Staff in Public Universities in Kenya

Joshua Mburu Ndungu

Lecturer, Kagumo Teachers Training College, Nyeri County, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed at investigating the association between employee age and job performance. The need for it was informed by the ongoing trends and discussions taking place in many countries about raising the retirement age of their employees. The target population was the 14,013 members of academic staff in public universities in Kenya from which a stratified random sample of 398 was picked using the Taro Yamane formula for finite populations. The Generativity theory was used to explain the relationship between employee age and job performance. A realist positivist research philosophy and a descriptive cross-sectional survey research design were adopted. Primary data was collected using a self-administered questionnaire. A linear regression analysis was conducted to establish the association between the study variables. All ethical aspects of scientific research were given due consideration. This study established that employee age had a statistically significant positive linear association with job performance. It therefore recommends that, the academic staff tenure be considered for extension to such an age when it can be scientifically and empirically determined that employees cannot effectively deliver on their jobs. This implies that the government, universities and other stakeholders would have to come up with policies, structures and finances for the lengthened tenure. Future research should consider investigating the age at which job performance is at its peak for purposes of enhancing employee motivation. Additionally, future research should seek to establish the age at which there is a decline in job performance which would then warrant retirement as well as a study on factors that mediate and/or moderate employee age-job performance relationship.

Keywords: Employee age, Job performance, Academic staff

BACKGROUND

On the global arena, there has been ongoing debates that touch on policies and legislations that provide guidance on changes of the retirement age of employees (Turek & Henkens, 2023). Indeed, there has been a labour issue in Kenya concerning the University Academic Staff Union (UASU), where university lecturers bargained to retire at seventy-five years as per a Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) signed with the government (Oduor, 2020). A similar discussion affecting senior judicial officers has been ongoing, where judges are expected to compulsorily exit employment at the age of seventy years but may choose to retire any time after reaching sixty-five years of age (Katiba Institute, 2024). On the other hand, information on the differences in the levels of job performance between old and young employees is scant. As of now, there are perceptions of disparities between old and young workers' job performance vis-a-vis how they actually perform (Motowidlo & Van Scotter, 1994). This discussion is important and should be expanded because older and younger workers have been found to actually differ in terms of contextual dimension of job performance (Ng & Feldman, 2008).

A popular line of thought among contributors in the employee age-job performance debate, is that when managers have an unfavourable perception about a certain age group, such a perception may influence their decisions concerning members of that age group. This may ultimately affect their actual or perceived job performance (Bertolino et al., 2013). Therefore, managerial attitudes towards the age of their employees may affect their perception of the employees' job performance level. On the other hand, the World Health Organization (WHO, October 2025) argues that the additional years lived by an employee provide a chance for them to contribute to the community, pursue abandoned passions and also achieve their educational goals. The

author, (WHO, October 2025), adds that there are incidences of old people, some of whom are octogenarians, whose job performance rivals that of some employees in their thirties. Additionally, and comparatively, older people are experiencing better levels of mental and physical performance today than in past generations (Study finds slowing of age-related declines in older Adults, 2024). All in all, there is a consensus among players in organizational management that ultimately, an employee should retire from formal employment.

Retirement is a process through which an organization terminates the services of an employee upon attainment of a prescribed age (Opatha, 2022). Employee retirement is mainly premised on perceived decline in job performance as an employee advances in age. Retirement is not just meant to ensure that employees do not work beyond their productive age, but also pave way for younger and more energetic generations to occupy the positions held by older employees (Katiba Institute, 2024). In this regard, Lam and Lee (2006) argue that employees' working memory, processing speed, attention and actual ability to process new information decline with age throughout workers' lives. Notably, the age at which the decline begins is not defined (Lam & Lee, 2006). In addition, due to global rises in life expectancy, there has been a trend towards increasing the retirement age. This is so that employees remain actively engaged and also paid for their services, instead of making pension payments to people who are no longer working for the organization. Therefore, there is need to provide empirical basis for decision-making, policy formulation and legislation on the appropriate retirement age of workers.

Additionally, theoretical and empirical studies have demonstrated that age can be used as an independent variable in studies focusing on employee job performance (Rietzschel et al., 2016). This is due to the fact that job performance in various professional areas may not be uniform across all ages. Job performance is defined as the extent to which organizational goals and objectives are achieved by an employee (Kazan & Gumus, 2013). Lewa (2014) adds that job performance is not just what employees achieve, but also the process through which they achieve the intended output. The importance of job performance in the dynamic environments where organizations carry out their operations has risen in the recent past (Ivanov & Avasilcăi, 2014). This is because organizational performance, and by extension sectoral performance, is a function of the job performances of all employees in the organization or the sector. Therefore, factors that affect, associate and relate to job performance should be accorded all the attention possible, so that it can be improved for the overall performance of an organization, the economic sector and the nation at large.

Several studies on factors that influence and/or are associated with job performance have been conducted. These studies include Adams (2025) on employee rewards, Chen & Lin (2024) on work environment, Jumawan et al (2024) on education levels, Nazir & Zamir (2015) on organizational culture, Muchiti & Gachunga (2015) on work-life balance, Dembele & Unsal, (2025) on organizational leadership styles and Shmailan (2016) on employee satisfaction. Notably, a review of previous work on job performance and the factors that associate and/or relate to it, reveals that few researchers have focused on employee age. Consequently, there lacks adequate empirical basis for decisions on how long employees should work and, by extension, at what age employees should exit from formal employment. Therefore, this study sought to add to the existing literature on employee age-job performance relationship and provide empirical basis for decisions, policies and legislations on the appropriate retirement age. It was guided by the objective of investigating the association between employee age and job performance.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Generativity theory provided the theoretical basis for employee age-job performance relationship in this study. Generativity can be defined as the psychological desire and drive to nurture, guide and mentor younger generations, and thereby create a lasting legacy that may outlive the self. Generativity was coined by Erik Erikson as a key stage of adult development, and focuses on making a positive impact on society through parenting, teaching, mentoring as well as productive or creative work (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2026). The Generativity theory is part of Erik Erikson's psychosocial development theory, and specifically the seventh stage, where individuals face a conflict between generativity and stagnation (Bishop, 2013). The author (Bishop, 2023) adds that conflict between generativity and stagnation occurs in the age of 35 to 65 years which, to a good approximation, is the age range of the academic staff in public universities in Kenya. A generative employee is guided by the view that he/she is made up of what lives longer than him/her (Slater, 2003).

The Generativity theory, gives a case for the human drive to nurture, guide, and create a lasting legacy for future generations. It involves investing oneself in impacting future generations, mentoring, and contributing positively and significantly to society so as to avoid feelings of stagnation. This theory predicts that older workers may find fulfillment and meaning in transmitting knowledge and skills to younger generations, which leads to enhanced job satisfaction and, therefore, better job performance. On the other hand, stagnation refers to the failure to find ways of contributing positively to the society (Cherry, 2025). A stagnant employee may feel disconnected from their organization and therefore may engage in counter-productive work behaviour like complaining, sabotaging organizational programmes, absenteeism and even pilferage. One strength of the Generativity theory is that it highlights the importance of lifelong development and not just meeting immediate personal needs as may be exhibited by children (Social Science Explainer, 2025). One of its weaknesses is that it assumes that all individuals follow the same developmental path which may not necessarily be the case.

Among the various factors that have been found to influence job performance by industry stakeholders and researchers, age of an employee has consistently captured the attention of many (Qian (2025). Existing literature reveals that, there has been a perception that older workers have difficulties multitasking, have higher job control and autonomy and never rush to beat deadlines (Joseph, 2014). The result of this position is that they are less prone to occupational stress which influences job performance negatively. The counterclaim is that older employees cannot get alternative employment and therefore have a lot to lose in case their employment is terminated. Hence, they may be more prone to occupational stress than the younger ones (Joseph, 2014). Additionally, older workers experience biased treatment from their younger colleagues who see themselves as having a better and longer future with the organization (Rauschenbach et al., 2013). A somewhat neutral argument was provided by Rembiasz (2017) who did his work in Poland and, out of his study, concluded that age does not influence job performance.

These divergent positions on association between employee age and job performance, when taken by managers, can influence work-related decisions and therefore job performance (Bertolino & Truxillo, 2013). The different views on the performance of older workers may however be mainly based on age stereotypes. Age stereotypes refer to the unjustifiable beliefs and expectations of older individuals as a specific social grouping with unique characteristics (Levy, Ashman & Dror, 2000). But research has proved that these stereotypes are inconsistent with the old workers' actual job performance, which may be comparable or even better than that of less aged workers (Ng & Feldman, 2008). In this regard, Masuku and Muchemwa (2015) revealed that when it comes to occupational stress, there is no statistically significant difference among workers that can be attributed to age difference. This finding is in agreement with Nor et al. (2016). On the other hand, Qian (2025) avers that there is a statistically significant negative correlation between employee age and job performance.

Ojwang (2012) established that for employees who were 41 years and above, personal accomplishment, and by implication, job performance was low. In her study, she (Ojwang, 2012) argues that more experienced employees had additional skills due to their being assigned more job tasks. Such tasks are those involving decision making, formulation of policies and supervision of junior workers. These additional tasks, as reported by Ojwang (2012), are extra risk factors in the experience of occupational stress among the employees which ultimately influences job performance in a negative way. Additionally, Akila and Priyadarshini (2018) revealed that workplace friendships were important to workers aged 35 years and below but were not important to those aged 41years and above. Accordingly, since workplace relationships are age-dependent, and they (workplace friendships) influence job performance, it follows that age has a bearing on job performance. A review of age-job performance relationship by McEnvoy & Cascio (1989) revealed that age and job performance were generally unrelated. The authors (McEnvoy & Cascio, 1989) further argue that for very young employees, age and job performance are modestly positively related. A contrary conclusion was arrived at by Kotur & Anbazhagan (2014) who established that job performance declines after 45 years of age.

On the other hand, Berthelot et al. (2019) posit that age-performance relationship is an inverted U with peaks in performance appearing early in life. However, the 'early in life' as pointed out by Berthelot et al. (2019) is not clearly defined. Odengo, Kinyanjui and Kiiru (2018) forward that older employees are good in leadership and pooling the right resources for the organization as compared to the younger ones who are good in execution of job tasks that have been agreed upon. It can therefore be observed that job performance of employees does not

necessarily decline with age. As per the reviewed literature, a conceptual framework for this study was drawn as depicted in Figure 1.

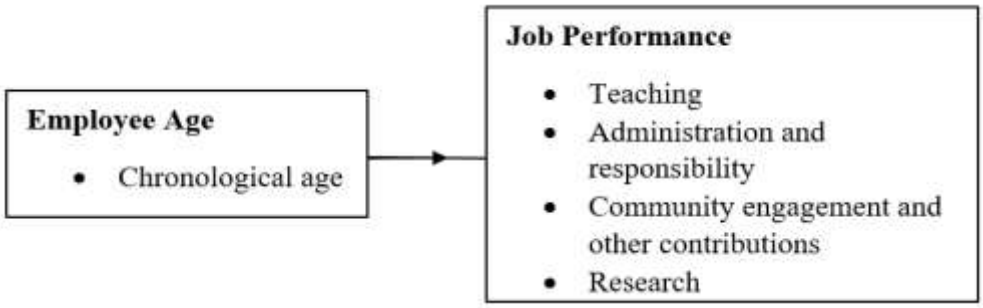

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of Employee Age and Job Performance

The conceptual framework shows that; employee age was measured using the actual chronological age. On the other hand, job performance was measured using the parameters of teaching, administration and responsibility, community engagement and other contributions, and lastly research. These parameters were deemed appropriate and sufficient to quantify the two variables of this study. Accordingly, in line with the objective of this study and the foregoing reviewed literature, a research hypothesis was formulated thus;

H_{01}: Employee age does not have a statistically significant association with job performance.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study adopted a positivist research philosophy. This philosophy takes the stance of physical sciences as it entails investigating an observable phenomenon after which law-like generalizations are the final outcomes (Sheppard, 2020). The generalizations can later be used to predict values assumed by the variables under investigation under similar or comparable conditions. Additionally, a realist view on existence and being was adopted. This view is based on the belief that reality exists in the world, and that this reality is independent of human thoughts and beliefs (Ababneh, 2020). Therefore, so as to quantify reality with regard to employee age and job performance, a study tool was developed. The tool was a self-administered questionnaire that was distributed member of academic staff who were picked sampling after sampling was done. Logically, the research design adopted was a descriptive survey. In a descriptive research design, the researcher seeks to describe a phenomenon of choice as it naturally exists without any manipulation of the variables as would be the case in an experimental design (Sheppard, 2020). The design was also survey in nature since a sample was picked to represent the target population. In terms of time duration, the design was cross-sectional. In a cross-sectional design, only one measurement is made for each group of respondents (Mohajan, 2018). For that reason, data was collected within a period of one month.

The self-administered questionnaire had a Likert scale or scales for each parameter. This made it easy for subjects to respond to the questions on the constructs under investigation. However, before the main study the tool was piloted to ascertain its reliability. The validity of the tool was discussed with experts in research. The target population was the members of academic staff in public universities in Kenya, which was made of 1252 professors, 1830 senior lecturers, 5879 lecturers and 5052 assistant lecturers (totaling to14,013) as provided by Mukhwana et al. (2016). All the other university employees were excluded from the study. Stratified random sampling was therefore used to pick a sample of 389 which was determined using Taro Yamane formula for finite populations. Data was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics and presented in tables and graphs. Descriptive analysis involved computing the gender proportions of participants, proportions of fields of specialization, minimum, maximum, mean ($\bar{x}$) and sample standard deviation (s). A pictorial representation (scatter plot) of the relationship between employee age and job performance was done for clarity.

Data was tested for fulfillment of linear regression assumptions before regression analysis could be carried out. This was done to avoid biased estimates of the regression parameters. The assumptions tested were the existence of a linear relationship between employee age and job performance, homoscedasticity of the independent variable data and normality of distribution of dependent variable data. Inferential data analysis was conducted

to test the research hypothesis. This was done through the computation of the coefficient of determination (R^2) of the linear regression model, the F-statistic and its p-value for the sake of making an inference about its statistical significance and lastly, the linear regression model coefficients and their corresponding p-values. The proposed regression model was;

$$\text{Job performance} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{Employee age} + \varepsilon,$$

where β_0 is the autonomous job performance, β_1 is the regression coefficient and ε is the error term.

Testing of hypothesis was done at 95% level of confidence (α=0.05). It was also anticipated that after statistically significant outcome of hypothesis testing, post hoc tests would be done on the data so as to establish which pairs of independent variables were different as well as the magnitude and direction of the differences. Additionally, all aspects of research ethics of anonymity, confidentiality and freedom to withdraw from the study were given due consideration. All the necessary authorizations to collect data form the public were also obtained before the conduct of the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data collection tool was piloted to ascertain its reliability and was found to have a Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient (α)= 0.805. This was acceptable according to George and Mallery (2003). A response rate of 76.86% was achieved which is acceptable for a social science study as argued by Ali et al. (2021) Those that responded comprised 58.19% (174) males and 41.81% (125) females and therefore there was gender parity. Of the total number of respondents, 44.8% (134) were in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) while 55.2% (165) were in the Humanities and Social Sciences. The two percentages were quite comparable and thus the findings of this study are generalizable to both disciplines.

To obtain a general view of the primary data that was collected, summaries of responses for both employee age and job performance are provided in Table 1 and Table 2.

Table 1: Summary of Employee Ages and their Frequencies

Employee Age						
Employee age group (years)	≤30	31-40	41-50	51-60	60≥	Totals
Frequency	20	39	115	110	15	299
(%)	(6.7%)	(13.0%)	(38.5%)	(36.8%)	(5.0%)	(100%)

From Table 1, the age of the employees was normally spread with most of the respondents being in the age bracket of 41 to 60 years (73.3%). This spread indeed justified the use of the Generativity theory in this study. Then, values of job performance were computed through averaging the scores in the parameters used to quantify job performance which were teaching, research, administration and responsibility as well as community engagement and other contributions. The scores were grouped due to the numerous values that emerged after addition and division operations were carried out on the data which had been obtained from the four parameters of job performance.

Table 2: Job Performance Scores and their Frequencies

Job performance					
Job performance	1.51 - 2.50	2.51 - 3.50	3.51 - 4.50	4.51 - 5.50	Total
Frequency	20	125	149	5	299
(% age)	(6.7%)	(41.8%)	(49.8%)	(1.7%)	(100%)

Table 2, shows that the lowest group in job performance ranged from 1.51 to 2.50 and had a frequency of 20 (6.7%). The last group was from 4.51 to 5.50 and had a frequency of 1.7%. It was also observed that most of the scores, 274 (91.6%), were between 2.51 and 4.50. This was an indication that the target population was to a large extent homogeneous.

A descriptive analysis of the data was carried out just to get a picture of the target population as revealed by the sample. The results of that process are as depicted in Table 3. From the table, it is noted that the mean employee age was 47.540 years with a standard deviation of 9.634 years. The minimum age was 25.5 years which was in the lowest age group and the maximum was 65.5 years which was in the last age group of 60 years and above. Job performance had a minimum value of 2.08, a maximum of 4.71, a mean of 3.480 and a standard deviation of 0.547 all of which were measured on a scale of 1 to 5.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive Statistics					
Variable	N	Min.	Max.	Mean ($\bar{x}$)	SD
Employee Age	299	25.5	65.5	47.5401	9.6335
Job performance	299	2.08	4.71	3.4802	.54722

Additionally, a scatter plot (Figure 2), to give a general view of the relationship between employee age and job performance and a best line of fit, was drawn for all the data points. This was so as to give a pictorial representation of their relationship. It is evident from the figure that within the age range of the respondents, there existed a positive linear relationship between the two variables.

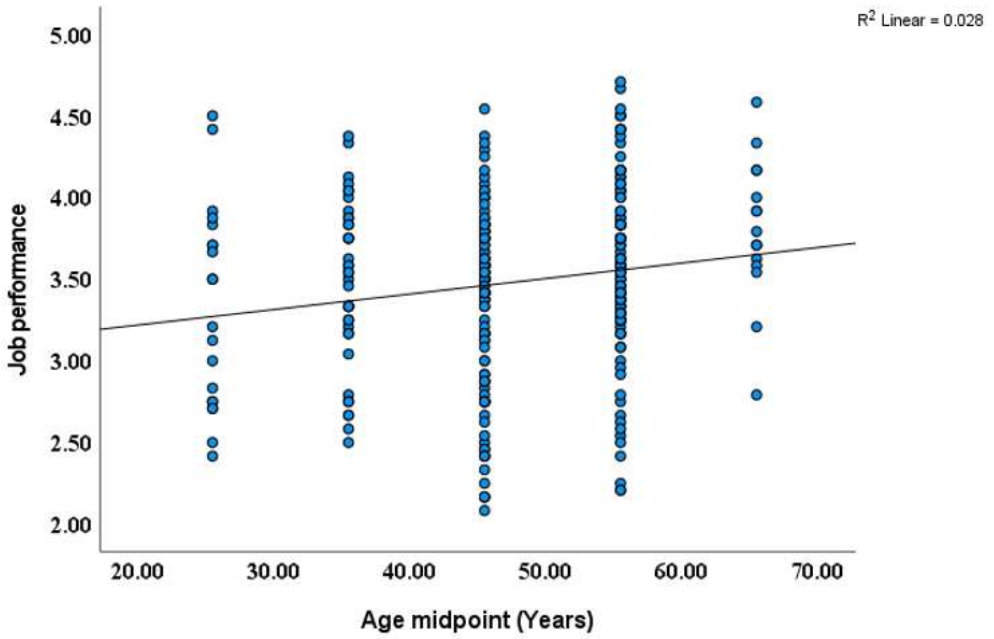

Figure 2: A scatter plot of Employee age groups midpoints and Job performance

Before linear regression analysis could be carried out, data was tested for fulfillment of linear regression assumptions. This was to ensure that the parameters obtained from the sample were not biased. The assumptions so tested were existence of a linear relationship between the independent and the dependent variable, dependent variable data being normally distributed and homoscedasticity (equality of variance) of the dependent variable. The first assumption of existence of a linear relationship between the independent and the dependent variable was fulfilled since a Correlation coefficient (r) = 0.167 existed between age of employee and job performance. The second assumption of homogeneity of variances was tested through application of Lavene's test. The results of that process were as presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Test of Homogeneity of Variances

Tests of Homogeneity of Variances					
		Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
Job performance	Based on Mean	.961	4	294	.429
	Based on Median	.828	4	294	.508
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	.828	4	285.7	.508
	Based on trimmed mean	.930	4	294	.447

As can be seen from Table 4, the results of homogeneity were non-significant, F (4, 294) = 0.961, p = 0.429 > 0.05 indicating that the variances were equal across the four groups. Therefore, the linear regression assumption of homogeneity was met. Hence, all necessary linear regression assumptions were met and analysis could proceed. For that reason, model summary, ANOVA analysis and the regression coefficients were computed and summarized in Tables 5, 6 and 7 respectively.

Table 5: Linear Regression Model Summary

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.167[a]	.028	.025	.54044
a. Predictors: (Constant), Employee age				

From Table 5, the coefficient of determination (R^2) was 0.028 which implied that 2.8% of the variation in job performance can be explained by age of academic staff of public universities. The remaining 97.2% is attributable to other factors that influence job performance. The standard error of the estimate was quite small with a value of ±0.54044. Therefore, the regression model was observed to be quite precise in its prediction of job performance by use of employee age.

Table 6: Results of ANOVA analysis

ANOVA[a]						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	2.491	1	2.491	8.530	.004[b]
	Residual	86.746	297	.292		
	Total	89.237	298			
a. Dependent Variable: Job performance						
b. Predictors: (Constant), Employee age						

The regression model of employee age and job performance was F (1,297) = 8.430 (p-value=0.004<0.05) and was therefore statistically significant. The null hypothesis, that employee age does not have a statistically significant association with job performance of academic staff in public universities was rejected. This meant that employee age indeed has a statistically significant association with job performance.

Since the results were statistically significant, Tukey's post hoc test (Honestly Significant Difference or HSD) was conducted. The carrying out of this test was aimed at pinpointing which specific pairs of employee age group means differed significantly after statistically significant ANOVA results, while controlling the family-

wise error rate. It compared all possible combinations of pairs, provided a rigorous way to determine the exact differences without increasing the risk of type I error in hypothesis testing. This test was done at 95% level of confidence. The results of that process were as presented in Table 7.

Table 7: Post Hoc Tests Multiple Comparisons, Tukey HSD, on Employee Age Across the Five Employee Age groups

Multiple Comparisons						
Dependent Variable: Job performance						
Tukey HSD						
		Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
(I)Age group	(J)Age group				Lower Bound	Upper Bound
≤30 years	31-40 years	-.14418	.14786	.866	-.5500	.2617
	41-50 years	-.04375	.13025	.997	-.4012	.3137
	51-60 years	-.24375	.13068	.339	-.6024	.1149
	60>years	-.47153	.18363	.079	-.9755	.0325
31-40 years	≤30 years	.14418	.14786	.866	-.2617	.5500
	41-50 years	.10043	.09962	.852	-.1730	.3739
	51-60 years	-.09957	.10019	.858	-.3746	.1754
	60>years	-.32735	.16333	.267	-.7757	.1210
41-50 years	≤30 years	.04375	.13025	.997	-.3137	.4012
	31-40 years	-.10043	.09962	.852	-.3739	.1730
	51-60 years	-.20000*	.07170	.044	-.3968	-.0032
	60>years	-.42778*	.14758	.033	-.8329	-.0227
51-60 years	≤30 years	.24375	.13068	.339	-.1149	.6024
	31-40 years	.09957	.10019	.858	-.1754	.3746
	41-50 years	.20000*	.07170	.044	.0032	.3968
	60>years	-.22778	.14797	.538	-.6339	.1784
60>years	≤30 years	.47153	.18363	.079	-.0325	.9755
	31-40 years	.32735	.16333	.267	-.1210	.7757
	41-50 years	.42778*	.14758	.033	.0227	.8329
	51-60 years	.22778	.14797	.538	-.1784	.6339
*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.						

As can be seen from the table, the pairs of employee age groups of 41-50 years and 51-60 years (p-value = 0.044 < 0.05), and 41-50 years and above 60 years (p-value=0.033< 0.05) showed statistically significant differences of 0.200 and 0.42778 in that order. All the other pairs of employee age groups presented statistically insignificant differences.

Linear regression coefficients were computed in line with the objective of the study to establish the rate of change in job performance with respect to employee age. The regression coefficients of employee age and job performance were as summarized in Table 8.

Table 8: Linear Regression Coefficients

Coefficients[a]						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	3.029	.158		19.216	.000
	Employee Age	.009	.003	.167	2.921	.004
a. Dependent Variable: Job performance						

From Table 8, β_0=3.029 (p-value=0.000 < 0.05) and therefore statistically significant. Additionally, β_1= 0.009 (p-value=0.004< 0.05) and therefore statistically significant as well. Hence the final linear regression equation for employee age-job performance relationship became;

Job performance= 3.029+ 0.009 Employee age + ε

This final regression equation means that there was a 3.029 level of job performance, measured on an arbitrary scale of 1 to 5, that was independent of employee age. In addition, there was a portion of job performance that varied directly with the age of the employee. For that reason, β_1= 0.009 which implies that for employees within the range of age that is currently employed by public universities, a unit rise in age leads to a 0.009 increase in job performance. This finding is consistent with that of Ng & Feldman (2008). It however contradicts the findings of Rembiasz (2017), Qian (2025), McEnvoy & Cascio (1989), Berthelot et al. (2019) and Kotur & Anbazhagan (2014). In addition, this study observes that besides age, there are several other factors that influence/associate with job performance which were assumed. Also, there are factors that mediate and/or moderate employee age-job performance relationship, like enhanced remuneration for high ranking university academic staff, which may lead to exponential rise in job performance for them as compared to staff in the lower cadres. Those factors were also not investigated and therefore their effect was neglected. Lastly, this study also did not inspect the data for peaks, plateaus and other deviations of employee age-job performance relationship from a perfectly linear association.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study has established that within the age range of academic staff in public universities, employee age has a statistically significant positive association with job performance. This implies that the academic staff are still generative and therefore contributing positively to their organizations, communities within which they operate, nationally as well as internationally. It is therefore recommended that retirement age be increased to such an age that empirical evidence proves unacceptable decline in their job performance. This would remove the burden on the government of having to remunerate healthy and productive people in retirement while not offering their expertise, experience and time in nation building. It would also give the academic staff member an opportunity to impact the community and future generations in line with the Generativity theory. Future research could focus on establishing the age at which job performance is at its peak for purposes of enhanced motivation and also the age at which decline in job performance is experienced for evidence-based decisions, policies and legislations on appropriate retirement age. Additionally, other factors that influence and associate with job performance should be investigated as well as those that mediate and/or moderate employee age-job performance relationship.

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