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Effect of talent acquisition strategies as a cognitive diversity management strategy on organizational performance in KTDA managed tea factories in Nyamira and Kisii counties, Kenya

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Abstract

The performance of Kenya Tea Development Agency (KTDA)-managed tea factories has increasingly come under scrutiny due to operational inefficiencies, workforce heterogeneity, and evolving market dynamics. This study's main objective was to establish the effect of talent acquisition strategies on organizational performance of tea factories in Nyamira and Kisii counties, Kenya. The study was anchored on the Resource-Based View (RBV) theory. A descriptive research design was employed, targeting 858 employees (managers, supervisors, and operational staff) across KTDA factories in Nyamira and Kisii Counties. Using Taro Yamane's 1967 formula, a sample size of 390 respondents was selected. Primary data was collected using structured questionnaires. Data analysis was conducted by help of SPSS, applying descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations). Correlation analysis was conducted using Pearson's product-moment coefficient; results showed that there was a moderate, significant and positive relationship between talent acquisition strategies and organizational performance. The study used simple linear regression to test the direct effect. The findings indicated that talent acquisition strategies had a positive and statistically significant relationship with organizational performance in KTDA-managed tea factories. The study concluded that talent acquisition strategies had a significant positive effect on organizational performance in KTDA managed tea factories in Nyamira and Kisii counties, Kenya. The study recommended that KTDA tea factories should strengthen talent acquisition by attracting diverse talent and expanding recruitment networks.

Keywords: Talent acquisition strategies, Cognitive Diversity management strategy, Organizational Performance

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background to the study

Globally, studies consistently show that structured and competency-based recruitment enhances organizational outcomes. For example, Mensah (2022) found that formalized and competency-driven recruitment significantly improved productivity, innovation capacity, and operational efficiency across 412 organizations in Sub-Saharan Africa. Similarly, Shah and Diwan (2023) reported that proactive talent sourcing and capability-based selection strengthened product quality, operational effectiveness, and organizational adaptability among 327 Indian manufacturing firms.

Regionally, evidence shows that employer branding and inclusive recruitment attract cognitively diverse talent that enhances innovation outcomes. Karanja and Asongu (2023) established that inclusive employer branding improved innovation performance and strengthened employee commitment across East African enterprises. Mensah and Boateng (2022) further found that structured onboarding- which forms part of a broader talent acquisition process- improved employee engagement, retention, and overall performance in Sub-Saharan manufacturing firms by accelerating new employee integration.

Locally, studies within Kenya's agro-processing context demonstrate that talent acquisition practices significantly influence operational outcomes. Cheruiyot and Karanja (2024) found that diversity-integrated employer branding and structured recruitment systems improved adaptability, retention, and operational performance in KTDA factories. Likewise, Mutua and Karanja (2024) reported that formal onboarding strengthened innovation, teamwork, and quality outcomes among KTDA employees, highlighting the performance benefits of structured entry-level talent management.

In contemporary organizational environments characterized by increasing complexity, technological change, and market uncertainty, the ability of firms to leverage diverse knowledge, perspectives, and problem-solving approaches has become a critical determinant of performance. While traditional diversity research has largely focused on demographic, functional, and cultural differences, recent scholarship increasingly emphasizes cognitive diversity as the most directly relevant dimension for organizational effectiveness. Cognitive diversity refers to variations in how individuals perceive problems, process information, and generate solutions, and it plays a central role in enhancing innovation, decision quality, and adaptability within organizations (Narayan et al., 2020; Wiyono et al., 2025).

However, cognitive diversity does not emerge spontaneously within organizations; rather, it is deliberately shaped through organizational systems and practices, (Mwangi, 2024). Among these, talent acquisition strategies represent the most foundational mechanism through which cognitive diversity is introduced into the organization. Recruitment and selection processes determine the composition of the workforce by influencing the range of knowledge bases, experiential backgrounds, and problem-solving orientations that employees bring into the organization. As such, talent acquisition is not treated in this study as a separate human resource function, but as a primary cognitive diversity management strategy through which organizations intentionally attract and integrate individuals with varied cognitive profiles.

From this perspective, talent acquisition strategies- including recruitment and selection; referral strategies; competitive sourcing and poaching; strategic partnerships- serve as structured mechanisms for embedding cognitive diversity within the organizational system. By targeting individuals with diverse educational backgrounds, professional experiences, and analytical orientations, these strategies shape the cognitive architecture of teams and influence how effectively organizations respond to operational challenges. This conceptualization aligns with emerging literature which views recruitment systems as critical entry points for diversity-driven capability building, particularly in production-oriented environments where problem-solving efficiency and adaptive decision-making are essential, (Ayuma, 2024; Mutiso, 2024).

In the context of KTDA-managed tea factories, where operational efficiency, product quality, and responsiveness to market and environmental dynamics are central to performance, the strategic design of talent acquisition systems becomes particularly important. In KTDA-managed tea factories, the need for cognitively diverse employees is intensified by operational complexity, market volatility, quality demands and evolving farmer expectations. The study conceptualized talent acquisition as one of the central mechanisms through which cognitive diversity is introduced into organizations. By embedding cognitive diversity within the workforce at the point of entry, factories are better positioned to enhance coordination, improve problem-solving, and strengthen overall organizational performance. Accordingly, this study conceptualizes talent acquisition strategies as the primary vehicle through which cognitive diversity is operationalized and examines their direct effect on organizational performance.

1.1.2 Performance of tea factories

1.1.2.1 Global Overview

The global tea sector has demonstrated resilience since the COVID-19 disruptions of 2020–2021, but the recovery has been uneven across producing countries and firms. World tea output increased in 2022 relative to 2021 as higher green-tea production offset declines in black-tea output in particular countries; global consumption recovered modestly in 2022 (FAO, 2024). This general production rebound, however, has been accompanied by substantial regional variation in yields, prices, and factory-level outcomes driven by climatic shocks, supply-chain disruptions and shifting demand patterns in major importing markets (FAO, 2024; Tridge, 2024).

Price volatility and shifting product mixes have been central determinants of factory performance worldwide. After the pandemic; some exporters experienced stronger demand for certain tea categories (e.g., specialty and high-end teas), while commodity (bulk) prices remained prone to swings driven by supply shortfalls in large producers (e.g., Sri Lanka) and production declines in India in 2024 that tightened global supplies and raised average prices (Tridge, 2024). For tea processors, these macro price movements translate directly into factory gate prices, margins and working-capital pressures, with smaller and less diversified factories typically more exposed to adverse price swings than larger integrated processors (Tridge, 2024).

At the factory (processing) level, studies and industry reports highlight three recurring performance drivers: first, adoption of processing technology and maintenance practices, second, efficiency of farm-to-factory supply chains (timeliness and leaf quality), and third, market and product strategies (buyer diversification, value-addition). Cross-country evidence shows that factories investing in process automation, quality control, and

logistics obtain higher throughput and lower waste rates, thereby improving profitability when market prices permit (IISD, 2024; Tea & Coffee Report, 2024). However, technology adoption has distributional effects: mechanization and automation can reduce unit costs but may also displace labor and require new managerial capabilities to realize full productivity gains (IISD, 2024).

Sustainability and certification schemes have become important, but they impose both costs and potential market benefits for factories. In several producing countries, adherence to voluntary sustainability standards (e.g., Rainforest Alliance, Fairtrade) has been associated with access to premium buyers and improved social/environmental practices; nevertheless, the direct financial benefit to smallholder-linked factories is mixed because certification costs and compliance burdens are often substantial (IISD, 2024). Consequently, factories must weigh certification investments against short-run financial pressures- a trade-off that has influenced factory decisions and, in some countries, led to policy debates about locally tailored certification approaches (IISD, 2024; Tea & Coffee Report, 2024).

Climate change and weather variability have also emerged as structural risks affecting factory performance globally. Heat waves, erratic rainfall and extreme events have reduced yields in parts of Asia and Africa, compressing the quantity and quality of green leaf reaching factories, and thus raising processing costs per kilogram of final product (FAO, 2024; Tridge, 2024). Several country-level studies in the 2020–2024 period link climatic shocks to both short-term profit declines and longer-term capital investment needs in processing infrastructure- two pressures that can erode factory resilience unless countered by strategic investments and adaptive management (FAO, 2024).

1.1.2.2 Performance of tea factories in Kenya

Tea remains one of Kenya's most important agricultural exports and a major employer across rural counties. After the disruption of 2019–2021 caused by global market fluctuations and the COVID-19 pandemic, Kenya's tea industry has shown a notable recovery and positive growth in marketed volumes and export earnings between 2022 and 2024. According to the Tea Board of Kenya's (TBK) national performance reports, marketed export volumes rose markedly from around 450 million kg in 2022 to some 523 million kg in 2023, generating record export earnings of approximately Kshs 180.6 billion in 2023; these upward trends continued into 2024, when export volumes and total earnings again increased (TBK, 2024a; TBK, 2024b). Seasonal variability and weather patterns continue to influence monthly and annual production, but the overall trajectory in 2022–2025 has been one of recovery and higher marketed volumes compared with the immediate pandemic years (Tea Board of Kenya, 2022; Tea Board of Kenya, 2024a).

At the factory level, however, aggregated national recovery masks considerable heterogeneity. Several empirical studies examining organizational and operational determinants of factory performance highlight that management practices, supply-chain effectiveness, and adoption of technology explain variation in factory-level outcomes (Ayuma, 2024; Gikunju et al., 2022). For example, studies of KTDA-managed factories and other processing firms find that technology-oriented innovations (process automation, improved factory maintenance) and better supply-chain linkages with smallholder farmers are associated with improved throughput, reduced waste, and higher factory profitability (Dorothy et al., 2022; Gikunju et al., 2022; Mwangi, 2024). These factory-level studies suggest that production increases at the national level are contingent on adoption of firm-level practices that improve processing efficiency and market responsiveness.

Several recent investigations emphasize supply-chain management as a pivotal influence on tea factory performance. Empirical work in the North Rift Valley and other producing regions shows that coordination between factories and farmers (timely deliveries, quality monitoring), cold-chain management, and internal logistics strongly affect both the quantity and quality of black-leaf marketed to auction and export channels (Ayuma, 2024). Where supply-chain and logistics practices are weak, factories experience lower factory gate prices, higher handling losses, and diminished competitiveness even when national export volumes are rising.

Market and product strategies have also contributed to performance variation. Studies that examined product innovation, market development and quality management in KTDA factories find positive associations between proactive market strategies (diversification of buyer relationships, branding, value-addition) and better financial outcomes (Dorothy et al., 2022; Motongwa, 2024). These investigations show that factories that pair production improvements with strategic market activities capture better margins and are less vulnerable to short-term auction price swings.

Nevertheless, structural and institutional constraints persist. Multiple authors report recurring challenges that limit factory performance and the ability to sustain gains: fluctuating global prices, rising input costs, climate-induced production variability, wage and labor issues, and certification/compliance costs (e.g., Rainforest

Alliance) that have become politically salient in recent policy debates (TBK, 2024b; The Guardian, 2025). Governance and financial sustainability of some smallholder-linked factories remain fragile, and the distribution of earnings across value chains (farmers versus processors versus traders) continues to generate tensions that can indirectly affect factory performance through supply reliability and leaf quality (KIPPRA, 2025).

Despite the overall national recovery, evidence consistently shows that KTDA-managed factories in Nyamira and Kisii Counties have performed poorly relative to factories east of the Rift Valley, with persistent disparities in bonus payments, production efficiency, and auction price realization. Reports from parliamentary committees and regional market analyses indicate that West-of-Rift factories- including Sanganyi, Nyankoba, Kebirigo, Tombe, Ogembo, and Gianchore- have repeatedly posted lower annual bonuses due to weaker leaf quality, higher unit production costs, and lower average auction prices for their processed tea (Parliament of Kenya, 2025; Tea Board of Kenya, 2024b). Several studies attribute these disparities to chronic operational inefficiencies, supply-chain inconsistencies, and managerial constraints that weaken the conversion of green-leaf inputs into competitive black-tea outputs (Ayuma, 2024; Gikunju et al., 2022). For instance, West-of-Rift factories experience higher leaf rejection rates, greater fluctuations in throughput, and higher overheads linked to logistics and energy costs (KIPPRA, 2025; Mwangi, 2024). Moreover, local governance challenges and farmer dissatisfaction stemming from lower earnings have contributed to inconsistent leaf supply, reinforcing a cycle of reduced quality and diminished performance (Mutiso, 2024). These persistent performance gaps underscore the need to examine how talent acquisition strategies shape operational decisions and factory-level outcomes in Nyamira and Kisii, where performance pressures are most acute.

1.2 Statement of the problem

In an ideal scenario, Kenya Tea Development Agency (KTDA)-managed factories would achieve optimal performance outcomes through the effective implementation of talent acquisition strategies that attract and integrate individuals with diverse cognitive orientations, skills, and problem-solving capabilities. Such diversity would enhance innovation, improve decision-making, and strengthen operational efficiency, thereby enabling factories to meet productivity, quality, and cost targets.

However, the current performance of KTDA-managed factories presents a contrasting reality characterized by stagnating productivity, inconsistent product quality, operational inefficiencies, and limited innovation despite substantial investments in human capital (TBK, 2024a). Empirical evidence indicates that smallholder tea productivity under KTDA management declined by 8.7% between 2018 and 2022 (TBK, 2024b). Additionally, factory throughput efficiency averages approximately 65% compared to an industry benchmark of 80% of installed capacity, contributing to elevated production costs (MOA Tea Sector Performance Highlights, 2024). Further, KTDA (2024) reports persistent disparities in throughput and efficiency across its more than 71 managed factories, suggesting inconsistencies in how internal resources are utilized.

These performance challenges raise critical questions regarding the effectiveness of current human resource practices, particularly talent acquisition strategies. Despite the presence of a sizeable workforce; existing recruitment and selection practices in many KTDA-managed factories remain largely standardized and operationally driven, with limited emphasis on attracting and integrating diverse cognitive capabilities that can enhance adaptability, innovation, and problem-solving. This has resulted in constrained learning, rigid work structures, limited collaboration, and ultimately suboptimal performance outcomes.

Prior studies in the tea sector have predominantly focused on agronomic practices, production efficiency, and market dynamics, there is limited empirical evidence on how talent acquisition strategies- particularly those aimed at fostering cognitive diversity- affect organizational performance at the factory level. This represents a significant contextual and theoretical gap, especially in KTDA-managed factories within Nyamira and Kisii counties, where similar operational environments continue to yield divergent performance outcomes.

It is against this background that the study sought to examine the effect of talent acquisition strategies on organizational performance in KTDA-managed tea factories in Nyamira and Kisii counties, with a view to providing empirical evidence on how strategic talent acquisition could be leveraged to enhance productivity, quality, efficiency, and innovation. Within this context, talent acquisition was not simply an administrative staffing function; it was a strategic process that shaped workforce capability, organizational learning potential and future growth. If factories recruited individuals with diverse educational backgrounds, functional skills and problem-solving approaches, they would more likely report improved decision quality, adaptability and operational effectiveness. The study therefore isolated talent acquisition strategies as a critical predictor of organizational performance and tested their direct effect empirically.

1.3 Specific Objective

To determine the effect of talent acquisition strategies on organizational performance of KTDA managed tea factories in Nyamira & Kisii.

1.4 Research Hypothesis

H_{01}: Talent acquisition strategies do not have a statistically significant effect on organizational performance of KTDA managed tea factories in Nyamira & Kisii.

1.5 Justification of the Study

The Kenyan tea industry remains one of the most critical pillars of national economic growth and rural livelihoods, with thousands of smallholder farmers directly dependent on the performance of KTDA-managed tea factories. Despite its strategic importance, the sector continues to experience persistent challenges, including fluctuating productivity levels, inconsistent tea quality, operational inefficiencies, and intensifying global competition. These challenges are further exacerbated by climate variability, evolving market preferences, and rapid technological changes, all of which necessitate more adaptive, innovative, and strategically responsive management approaches within tea factories.

Addressing these challenges requires more than conventional operational improvements; it calls for deliberate and structured management of human capital, particularly the cognitive diversity embedded within the workforce. Diverse knowledge bases, problem-solving approaches, and experiential backgrounds among employees have the potential to enhance innovation, improve decision-making, and strengthen operational efficiency. However, in many KTDA-managed factories, talent acquisition has traditionally focused on technical qualifications and operational needs, with limited emphasis on strategically leveraging cognitive diversity when sourcing for talent as a driver of organizational performance.

Existing studies in the tea sector have largely concentrated on production efficiency, agronomic practices, and market dynamics, with limited empirical attention given to how talent acquisition strategies- particularly those that foster cognitive diversity- contribute to performance outcomes at the factory level. This creates a critical knowledge gap, especially in the context of KTDA-managed factories in Nyamira and Kisii counties, where performance inconsistencies persist despite operating under similar structural and market conditions.

The study was therefore justified by the need to examine how talent acquisition strategies can be strategically designed and implemented to attract, select, and integrate individuals with diverse cognitive strengths and problem-solving orientations, and how these strategies influence organizational performance. By doing so, the study contributed to both theory and practice by positioning talent acquisition as a strategic resource capable of enhancing key performance indicators such as productivity, quality, efficiency, and innovation in KTDA-managed tea factories.

2.0 Review of Literature

2.1.1 Resource-Based View (RBV) theory

The Resource-Based View (RBV) remains one of the most influential perspectives in strategic management. Although its intellectual foundations trace back to Penrose's 1959 characterization of firms as bundles of productive resources and Wernerfelt's 1984 early formalization of resource-based thinking; the theory was firmly established by Barney in 1991, who argued that internal resources- rather than external market forces- are the primary basis of sustainable competitive advantage. Contemporary scholarship continues to affirm the centrality of RBV in explaining performance heterogeneity across firms (Krajcsak, 2022; Ahuja & Chan, 2023; Park & Kim, 2024), emphasizing that the theory shifted strategic analysis from industry conditions to the unique endowments that organizations possess and the capabilities that enable their effective deployment (Vargas et al., 2021; Knott, 2022).

RBV posits that firms differ because they hold heterogeneous bundles of tangible and intangible resources that vary in value, rarity, inimitability, and substitutability. In modern formulations, resources generate sustained competitive advantage only when they meet the VRIN conditions; meaning they must be valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable; the resources should be supported by an organizational system capable of leveraging them (Barney et al., 2021; Adegbile & Sarpong, 2021; Seo & Park, 2023). Intangible resources- such as knowledge, cognitive capability, skills, and organizational routines- have gained prominence in recent discourse due to their complexity and resistance to imitation, making them particularly strategic in dynamic environments (Wilden et al., 2022; Sirmon & Hitt, 2023). The theory assumes that resource heterogeneity

persists among firms and that resources are imperfectly mobile, which explains why organizations in similar contexts often achieve different outcomes (Hitt et al., 2023).

Despite its value, RBV has faced notable critiques. Scholars argue that it is inherently static, offering limited explanation of how resources evolve in rapidly changing markets, prompting calls for integration with dynamic capabilities to address issues of renewal and transformation (Teece, 2021; Helfat & Peteraf, 2023). Additionally, concerns have been raised about conceptual ambiguity and the risk of tautology, where resources are deemed valuable simply because they correlate with performance (Kozlenkova et al., 2021; Kull, 2022). The difficulty of measuring intangible resources- particularly knowledge, culture, and cognitive diversity- has also been highlighted as a methodological limitation (Amit & Schoemaker, 2022; Fainshmidt & Smith, 2023). Furthermore, RBV has been critiqued for underemphasizing external environmental conditions, which may also shape organizational competitiveness (Morgan et al., 2021; Reddy & Raghavan, 2024). These limitations underscore the need for careful operationalization, contextual clarity, and complementary theoretical perspectives.

In the context of this study, the Resource-Based View (RBV) provides the primary theoretical lens for explaining how talent acquisition strategies contribute to organizational performance in KTDA-managed tea factories. Specifically, talent acquisition is conceptualized not merely as a routine human resource function, but as a strategic capability through which factories build a workforce endowed with diverse cognitive skills, knowledge, and problem-solving abilities. When effectively designed and implemented, talent acquisition strategies enable organizations to attract and select individuals whose competencies are aligned with evolving operational, technological, and market demands in the tea sector.

From an RBV perspective, such talent acquisition practices generate value by enhancing operational efficiency, improving tea quality, and strengthening innovation capacity- key performance indicators within KTDA factories. These capabilities may also exhibit rarity, particularly where factories successfully attract unique skill combinations or experiential knowledge not readily available in competing factories. Furthermore, the socially complex and path-dependent nature of recruitment systems, organizational culture, and experiential learning makes these human capital configurations difficult to imitate. In addition, the integration of talent acquisition with internal systems such as training, team configuration, and leadership practices limits substitutability, thereby reinforcing their strategic significance.

Consequently, RBV supports the argument that differences in organizational performance among KTDA-managed factories can be partly explained by variations in how talent acquisition strategies are structured, implemented, and aligned with organizational systems. The theory thus underpins the study's proposition that talent acquisition strategies, as intangible and strategic resources, have a significant effect on organizational performance when effectively leveraged within supportive organizational and leadership contexts.

2.2 Empirical literature

2.2.1 Talent acquisition strategies and performance

Mensah (2022), did a study on 'strategic Talent Acquisition and Organizational Performance in Sub-Saharan Africa' a multi-country quantitative study involving 412 organizations across Ghana, Nigeria, South Africa, and Kenya, applied hierarchical regression to examine the impact of structured recruitment on firm performance. The study found that competency-based and formalized recruitment processes significantly enhanced organizational productivity, innovation capacity, and operational efficiency. Firms with structured talent acquisition policies outperformed those using informal hiring practices. However, the study did not evaluate cognitive diversity within recruitment processes making the recruitment non-strategic.

Shah and Diwan (2023) conducted a cross-sectional quantitative survey of 327 Indian manufacturing firms in a study on 'proactive talent acquisition and Organizational Adaptability in Indian Manufacturing Firms' and used structural equation modelling to investigate proactive talent acquisition practices. Their findings showed that strategic sourcing, capability-driven selection, and employer value propositions significantly improved product quality, operational effectiveness, and organizational adaptability. Despite these contributions, the study did not address agro-processing sector dynamics or explore cognitive diversity considerations within selection procedures.

Zhang (2024) in a study on 'artificial intelligence adoption in recruitment and selection: Implications for Hiring Quality' conducted mixed-methods research involving 185 surveys and 32 interviews with HR managers in the Philippines and reported that AI-enabled recruitment increased hiring efficiency, reduced cognitive bias, and improved candidate–job fit. While the findings demonstrated positive implications for long-term performance,

the study did not establish direct empirical links between AI-driven recruitment, innovation performance, or operational outcomes.

Mensah and Boateng (2022) used a mixed-methods design involving surveys and semi-structured interviews in Ghana and Nigeria in research titled 'onboarding, socialization, and employee engagement in Sub-Saharan Manufacturing Firms' and found that structured onboarding practices enhanced employee engagement, retention, and overall performance by improving role clarity and accelerating new employee socialization. Nonetheless, the study did not evaluate how onboarding contributes to strategic talent acquisition which considers cognitive diversity diversities among recruited staff.

Cheruiyot and Karanja (2024), in a study on 'employer branding, talent retention, and operational performance in KTDA Factories' using a mixed-methods study of 312 KTDA supervisors and HR officers, indicated that diversity-integrated employer branding and structured recruitment systems improved employee retention, adaptability, and operational performance in tea factories. Despite these findings, the study did not distinguish cognitive diversity from other diversity categories within recruitment practices.

2.3 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study illustrates the relationship between talent acquisition strategies and organizational performance within KTDA-managed tea factories. Talent acquisition strategies—comprising recruitment and selection, referral systems, competitive sourcing, and strategic partnerships- are conceptualized as strategic organizational capabilities that enable the attraction and integration of individuals with diverse cognitive abilities. These strategies facilitate the development of cognitive diversity within the workforce, which enhances problem-solving, innovation, and operational efficiency. Organizational performance is measured using multidimensional indicators, including productivity, quality, market outcomes, and stakeholder-related metrics. Grounded in the Resource-Based View, the framework posits that talent acquisition strategies represent intangible resources that are valuable, rare, and difficult to imitate, thereby contributing to performance heterogeneity across factories. The framework thus provides a basis for examining how internal human capital strategies influence organizational outcomes in the tea processing sector. The conceptual framework is shown in fig 1.

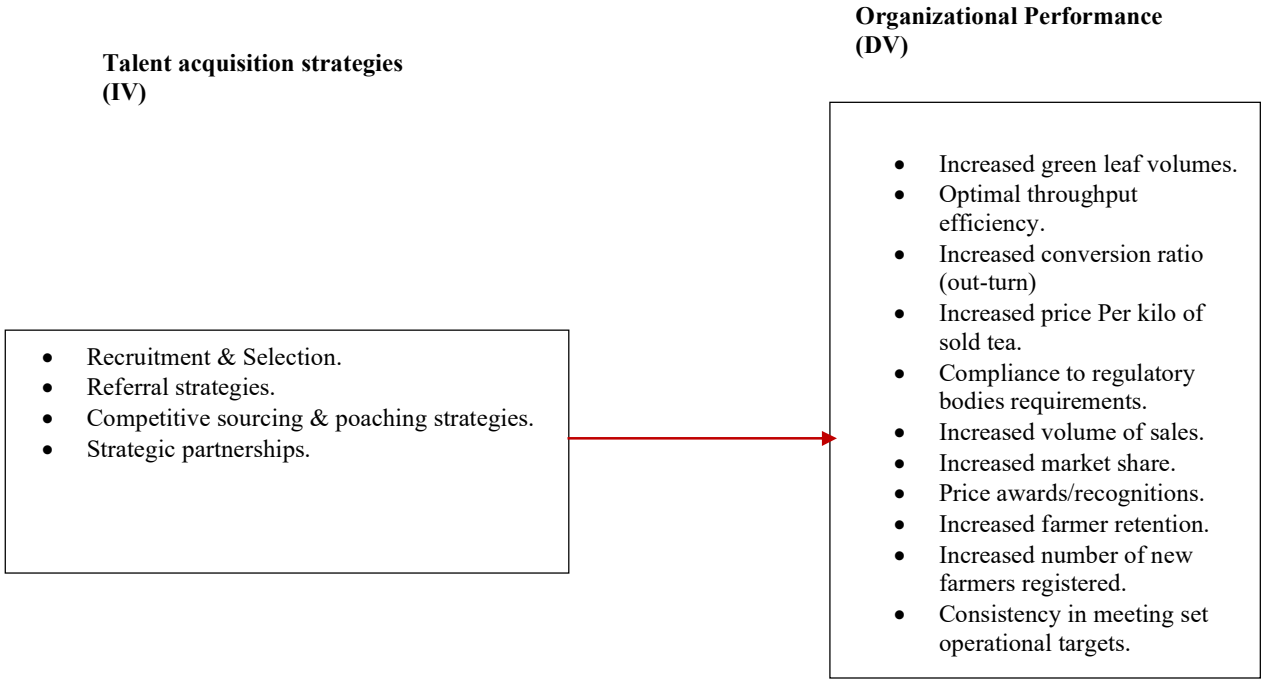

Figure 1: Conceptual framework showing effect of Talent acquisition strategies on organizational performance of KTDA managed tea factories

3.0 Research Methodology

3.1 Research design

Research design is the blueprint that guides the collection, measurement, and analysis of data to answer research questions and achieve research objectives (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This study adopted a quantitative approach, which emphasizes numerical data collection and statistical analysis to test hypotheses and establish relationships among variables. It was particularly appropriate since the study sought to examine the effect of talent acquisition strategies on organizational performance of KTDA factories, in a manner that allows generalization of findings.

Within the quantitative paradigm, the study employed descriptive design. Descriptive research design is appropriate for systematically describing the characteristics of respondents and the status of variables under investigation, such as the extent to which KTDA factories apply talent acquisition as a cognitive diversity strategy (Sekaran & Bougie, 2020).

Moreover, descriptive designs have successfully been applied in similar contexts. For instance, Ahuja and Chan (2023) used a descriptive survey to examine leadership's role in enhancing cognitive diversity and organizational learning. Similarly, Chen et al. (2022) applied descriptive design to study the impact of performance evaluation instruments on organizational effectiveness in the construction sector. These examples show that descriptive research design is practical for studying organizational strategies, intangible resources, and their effect on performance.

3.2 Study area

A study area refers to the specific geographical location or setting where a research project is conducted (Kothari & Garg, 2022). It provides the physical and contextual backdrop for data collection, helping to define the scope and applicability of the study findings (Omosa, 2022). Clearly defining the study area is essential because it contextualizes the research, establishes the physical and socio-economic boundaries within which data are collected, and helps readers understand the scope and applicability of the findings (Kothari & Garg, 2022). The choice of study area often reflects the research problem, objectives, and practical considerations such as accessibility, population characteristics, and resource availability (Kothari & Garg, 2022). By situating the research within a defined geographical context, researchers enhance the clarity, relevance, and credibility of their study, ensuring that conclusions drawn are meaningful and grounded in a real-world setting (Saunders, 2019).

Nyamira and Kisii Counties were selected because they form a major part of Kenya's western tea-growing zone under KTDA and present both representative and contextually relevant conditions for this study. The factories in these counties have in recent years shown fluctuating performance and comparatively lower bonus payments, challenges consistently linked to management practices, innovation capacity, and broader organizational systems. These performance gaps provided an ideal setting to examine how talent acquisition strategies (recruitment and selection, referral strategies, competitive sourcing and poaching strategies, strategic partnerships) influence organizational performance. The workforce in the two counties also reflects significant cognitive, educational, and experiential diversity, making them suitable for evaluating how such diversity affects factory outcomes when appropriately managed. Moreover, prior studies (e.g., Otieno, 2022) highlight persistent weaknesses in talent management approaches within KTDA factories in this region. Focusing on Nyamira and Kisii therefore allowed the study to generate findings that are both generalizable across KTDA factories and directly applicable to a region facing real and well-documented performance challenges.

3.3 Target population

The target population for this study constituted of employees of KTDA-managed tea factories located in Nyamira and Kisii Counties. These two counties collectively host 14 tea factories, namely Nyansiongo, Nyankoba, Tombe, Gianchore, Kebirigo, Matunwa, Sanganyi, and Sombogo in Nyamira County, and Nyamache, Itumbe, Ogembo, Eberege, Kiamokama, and Rianyamwamu in Kisii County. The factories are representative of KTDA-managed operations, as they exhibit similarities in governance structure, production systems, and workforce composition, which made them suitable for this investigation. The total target population across the 14 factories was 858 permanent employees comprising of: managers, supervisors, and operational staff. Table 1 shows the summary of the target population.

Table 1: Target Population.

Factory	Managers	Supervisors	Operational Staff	Total
Gianchore	6	4	71	81
Kebirigo	10	2	47	59
Nyankoba	7	4	97	108
Sanganyi	6	4	80	90
Tombe	6	3	58	67
Sombogo	4	1	28	33
Nyansiongo	7	2	77	86
Matunwa	2	1	5	8
Ogembo	6	2	53	61
Eberege	4	2	49	55
Kiamokama	6	2	39	47
Rianyamwamu	4	2	37	43
Nyamache	6	3	57	66
Itumbe	6	2	46	54
Total	**80**	**34**	**744**	**858**

Source: KTDA data 2026

3.4 Sampling and sample size

Sampling refers to the process of selecting a subset of individuals or items from a larger population to represent the entire group in a study (Shakiru & Ismet Boz, 2021). The main purpose of sampling is to gather data that accurately reflects the characteristics, experiences, or opinions of the whole population without the need to collect information from every single member, which is often impractical due to time, cost, and logistical constraints (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

3.4.1 Sample size

A sample size refers to the specific number of observations or respondents selected from a larger population to participate in a study, ensuring the findings are statistically valid and representative of that population (Saunders et al., 2019). The study adopted Taro Yamane's 1967 formula for determining the appropriate sample size. The formula was given as:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Where:

n = sample size

N = total population (858)

e = desired level of precision (0.05 at 95% confidence level)

Substituting the values:

$N = 858/1+858(0.05^2) = 273$

Recognizing that real-world data collection often encounters non-response, incomplete, or invalid responses, the study made provision for a 30% non-response rate in line with recommendations by Omosa et al. (2022). This adjustment increases the sample to ensure that the effective (completed) sample remains statistically adequate after accounting for expected attrition.

Using the calculated sample n=273 and applying the non-response contingency:

Adjusted sample = n/1−non-response rate = 273/1−0.30= 390.

The study involved 390 respondents drawn from KTDA-managed tea factories in Nyamira and Kisii Counties, comprising 39 managers, 17 supervisors, and 334 operational staff. This distribution reflected the full organizational hierarchy of KTDA factories and ensured a comprehensive understanding of how talent

acquisition strategies influence performance. In KTDA factories, managers are senior officials responsible for strategic oversight, resource allocation, compliance, and overall factory operations. The supervisors oversee production processes, coordinate workflows, and monitor quality, making them key informants on how management strategies are executed on the ground. Operational staff include machine operators, quality controllers, leaf clerks, maintenance personnel, and general workers who perform the core production tasks. Their input provided practical insights into how recruitment and selection, referral strategies, competitive sourcing and poaching; strategic partnerships affect day-to-day performance outcomes. Together, these three respondent groups offered a balanced and reliable representation of the strategic, supervisory, and operational dimensions of KTDA factory. This strengthened the validity of the study and ensured that perspectives across all levels of factory operations were adequately captured.

The sample size of 390 was consistent with empirical practice in organizational research conducted in comparable contexts; comparable research has adopted similar sample sizes within the range of 380 to 400, demonstrating the methodological appropriateness of such a sample size in organizational studies. Teklehaimanot et al. (2023) conducted a study on leadership practices among primary healthcare managers and used a systematically determined sample of 532 respondents, demonstrating that large, statistically calculated samples are widely accepted in organizational research involving stratified populations. These examples affirmed the methodological validity of a sample size of 390 in this study. Table 2 shows the study sample size.

Table 2: Sample size.

Factory	Managers	Supervisors	Operational Staff	Total
Gianchore	3	2	33	38
Kebirigo	5	1	21	27
Nyankoba	4	2	43	49
Sanganyi	3	2	35	40
Tombe	3	2	26	31
Sombogo	1	0	13	14
Nyansiongo	4	1	33	38
Matunwa	1	0	3	4
Ogembo	3	1	24	28
Eberege	1	1	23	25
Kiamokama	3	1	17	21
Rianyamwamu	1	1	17	19
Nyamache	4	2	25	31
Itumbe	3	1	21	25
Total	**39**	**17**	**334**	**390**

Source: KTDA data 2025.

3.4.2 Sampling procedure

A sampling procedure is the systematic method or set of steps researchers use to select a subset of individuals or cases from a larger population to participate in a study (Sekaran & Bougie, 2022). To ensure the sample accurately reflects the diversity of roles within the KTDA-managed tea factories, the study employed a stratified random sampling technique. Stratified sampling ensured that each category was adequately represented in the sample relative to its size in the population (Kothari, 2014). Once the strata were established, simple random sampling was used to determine the number of respondents selected from each stratum. This approach guaranteed that all relevant subgroups were adequately represented, thereby enhancing the generalizability and validity of the study findings. The proportional allocation ensured the sample mirrored the real structure of the workforce across the fourteen factories.

3.4.3 Sampling frame

The sampling frame refers to the list of elements from which a sample is drawn, and it should adequately represent the target population (Bryman, 2016). In this study, the sampling frame comprised the formal organizational structure of all the 14 KTDA-managed factories in Nyamira and Kisii counties. Each Factory's unit manager was requested to provide an up-to-date staff list and a hierarchical organizational chart that

reflected current personnel and functional divisions. This approach was suitable because it ensured accurate representation of managers, supervisors, and operational staff across the factories, thereby enhancing the reliability of the sampling process (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Using the formal organizational chart minimized coverage error and ensured that no eligible respondent category was excluded. Moreover, the hierarchical format reflected the management chain of command, which was crucial for aligning the study with decision-making and performance structures within KTDA factories.

Although KTDA factories have a hierarchical structure consisting of managers, supervisors, and operational staff, all respondent cadres were required to respond to all questionnaire items. This approach was deliberately chosen to ensure comprehensive assessment of talent acquisition strategies, and organizational performance across the entire organizational structure. First, all employees, regardless of position, interact with or experience the effects of talent acquisition and performance outcomes. Even where a respondent was not directly responsible for implementing a specific practice, they were still well positioned to provide valid perceptions based on their day-to-day experiences, observations, and interactions. The typical organizational chart across KTDA factories is shown in Figure 2.

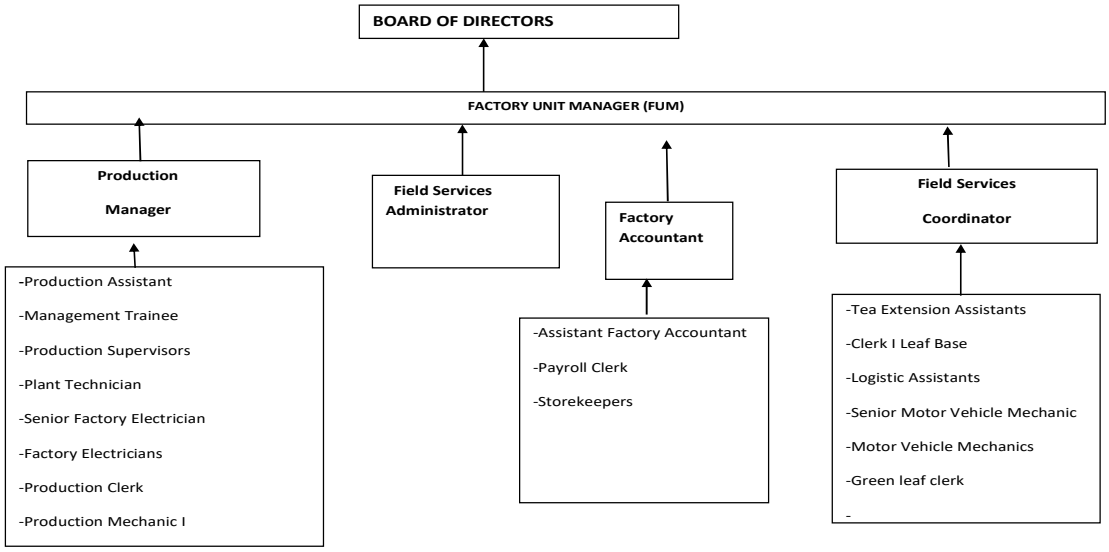

Figure 2: Showing organizational structure of a KTDA Factory

Source: KTDA data 2026

3.5 Data collection

Data collection refers to the systematic process of gathering information that is relevant to the research problem in order to provide answers to the study objectives (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). It is central to transforming theoretical constructs into empirical evidence that supports valid and reliable conclusions. Research data is categorized into two types: primary data and secondary data. Primary data refers to original data collected firsthand by the researcher specifically for the study's objectives, often through surveys, interviews, experiments, or observations whereas secondary data consists of information previously collected and documented by other researchers, institutions, or databases, such as reports, publications, and archival records. Proper data collection methods enhance the credibility and replicability of research findings (Sekaran & Bougie, 2022). The study collected primary data to answer the research objective.

3.6 Data collection instruments

A data collection instrument is any tool or device- such as a questionnaire, interview schedule, or observation checklist- used by researchers to systematically gather data relevant to study objectives (Sekaran & Bougie, 2022). The primary instrument for data collection in this study was a structured questionnaire.

3.6.1 Validity of research instrument

Validity is concerned with the degree to which a research instrument accurately measures the constructs it is intended to measure (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). To ensure the research instrument used in this study was valid, both content validity and construct validity were assessed. Content validity was assessed to confirm whether the questionnaire fully represented the breadth of the concept it intended to measure; this was evaluated through expert reviews and quantified using the Content Validity Index (CVI).

Construct validity examined how well questionnaire items empirically aligned with theoretical constructs, through Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA), (Chen et al., 2022). EFA assessed whether questionnaire items grouped together under expected latent constructs (Williams et al., 2010). Before conducting EFA, data suitability was evaluated using the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity. KMO values of ≥ 0.60 and a significant Bartlett's Test ($p < .05$) indicated that the data was suitable for factor analysis (Hair et al., 2019). Factors were extracted using Principal Component Analysis with Varimax rotation, and items with loadings of ≥ 0.40 were retained (Field, 2018).

3.6.2 Reliability of research instrument

The study conducted reliability testing through a pilot study done prior to the main data collection. The pilot study was administered to respondents who shared similar characteristics with the target population but were not part of the final sample to avoid biasing the main analysis; the pilot study was conducted in Mogogosiek tea factory in zone nine (9) located in the neighboring Bomet County.

The number of respondents for the pilot study followed recommended methodological guidelines suggesting that the pilot sample should typically be 10% of the sample size (Hertzog, 2008; Johanson & Brooks, 2010). Reliability of the questionnaire was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha coefficient (α)**,** which assesses the internal consistency of multi-item scales (Gliem & Gliem, 2003). A Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.70 or higher was considered reliable, indicating that items measuring each construct were sufficiently correlated and consistently captured the same underlying concept (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011).

3.7 Data analysis and presentation

Data analysis and presentation are critical steps in ensuring that research findings are transformed into meaningful insights to address the study objectives. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), data analysis involves organizing, reducing, and interpreting data to provide logical explanations to research questions. In this study, data analysis was conducted with the help of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The results were presented in tables and figures for clarity and interpretability (Saunders et al., 2019).

3.7.1 Data analysis

The study adopted descriptive statistical methods to analyze data with the help of Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) to generate descriptive and inferential statistics, ensuring systematic, objective, and replicable analysis (Sekaran & Bougie, 2022). Data was presented in form of tables, figures, means, frequencies, percentages and standard deviation. This descriptive approach provided an overview of the sample's demographic characteristics and the distribution of responses for the study variables.

3.7.2 Correlation Analysis

Correlation analysis was conducted using Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficient (r) to determine the strength and direction of association between talent acquisition strategies (X) and performance (Y). The coefficient ranges between -1 and +1, where values closer to ±1 indicate stronger relationships, while values near zero denote weaker associations (Field, 2018). According to Cohen in 1988; thresholds for interpretation are: weak ($r = .10–.29$), moderate ($r = .30–.59$), and strong ($r \geq .60$).

Correlation analysis provided the foundational evidence for regression analysis. If significant correlations existed between the independent and dependent variables; regression analysis becomes justified as a method for predicting the effect of independent variable on the dependent variable (Cohen et al., 2003).

3.7.3 Regression analysis

Regression analysis was employed to establish the predictive power of talent acquisition strategies on performance.

3.7.3.1 Simple linear regression (SLR)

Simple linear regression was used to test the direct effect of talent acquisition (X) on Organizational performance (Y). The following simple linear regression model was generated: -

$Y=\beta_0+\beta_1X+\varepsilon$

Where:

Y = Organizational performance (DV)

β_0 = Constant term

β_1 = Beta Coefficient(s) of IVs

X = The Talent management strategies (IV)

ε = Error term

4.0 Data analysis and Discussion of Findings

4.1 Descriptive Statistics

4.1.1 Talent Acquisition Strategies

Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement to statements which related to talent acquisition strategies using a 5 Likert scale. The responses were analyzed using mean scores and standard deviations.

The results showed that job advertisements attracted applicants with diverse educational or skill backgrounds (mean = 4.21, SD = 0.810)**.** This suggested that the factories' advertisements were effective in attracting candidates with varied educational qualifications and skills, thereby promoting diversity of knowledge within the workforce. Similarly, respondents agreed that the selection panel included people with different knowledge, skills, and ideas (mean = 4.18, SD = 0.818). This implied that the recruitment process incorporated diverse perspectives during candidate evaluation, which can enhance fairness and the quality of hiring decisions. The findings further revealed that recruitment focuses on skills needed for the factory's future growth (mean = 4.14, SD = 0.873). These results (B1, B2 and B4- strong agreement) indicated that formal and structured recruitment processes were well established and effectively promoting cognitive diversity at staff entry level. This indicated that the factories place emphasis on strategic talent acquisition aimed at supporting long-term organizational development and competitiveness.

In addition, respondents agreed that referral practices had increased the mix of knowledge and experience within teams (mean = 3.92, SD = 0.886), suggesting that employee referrals contributed to broadening the range of skills and expertise available in the organization. Furthermore, the results showed that recruitment cycles had increased the variety of problem-solving approaches represented in the workforce (mean = 3.82, SD = 0.890). This suggested that hiring practices had gradually introduced employees with different perspectives and approaches to addressing workplace challenges. Likewise, respondents moderately agreed that engagement with other agribusiness or manufacturing firms supported long-term talent pipelines that enhance workforce capability and diversity (mean = 3.79, SD = 1.074). This indicated that collaboration with external organizations contributed to the development of a more capable and diverse workforce.

Similarly, talent accessed through external partnerships such as the Tea Research Institute and the Tea Board of Kenya introduced new ideas and approaches that differ from existing practices (mean = 3.85, SD = 0.988). This implied that partnerships with industry institutions played a role in introducing innovative thinking and new knowledge into the factories' operations. These findings (moderate B3, B5, B8 and B9) suggested that: recruitment was somewhat successful in increasing diversity in problem-solving approaches and that external partnerships and referral systems were present but not fully optimized.

Respondents also moderately agreed that employees recruited from other competing factories brought alternative ways of thinking into the workforce (mean = 3.69, SD = 1.196**)**, indicating that cross-organizational hiring contributed to cognitive diversity within the factories. However, there was relatively lower agreement on whether factories at times poached employees from other organizations (mean = 3.00, SD = 1.356). This suggested that employee poaching was not a common or clearly recognized talent acquisition strategy within the factories. These two weakest areas (neutral to moderate, B6 and B7) implied that: competitive sourcing strategies were underutilized and the high standard deviations (especially B6 and B7) indicated divergent views, meaning: some factories were practicing these strategies while others did not. Overall, the items measuring talent acquisition strategies recorded a grand mean of 3.84 and a standard deviation of 0.99**,** indicating that respondents generally agreed that talent acquisition practices contributed to enhancing diversity of knowledge, skills, and ideas within the workforce.

The grand mean of 3.84 indicated that talent acquisition strategies were moderately to strongly practiced across KTDA-managed tea factories. This established that the independent variable (talent acquisition) was present and

measurable, thus suitable for inferential testing. This provided the basis for regression analysis, which examined whether these practices significantly influenced organizational performance. These findings suggested that the tea factories had moderately embraced recruitment strategies that promoted cognitive diversity, which may positively influence organizational performance.

Most items had standard deviations below 1, indicating consistency in responses**.** However: B6 (SD = 1.356) and B7 (SD = 1.196) showed high variability, suggesting inconsistent implementation across factories. The findings demonstrated that: Talent acquisition was contributing to cognitive diversity, consistent with the Resource-Based View, where human capital is treated as a strategic resource; however, the uneven application of some strategies suggested limitations in fully leveraging this resource.

Overall, the results indicated that: talent acquisition strategies were moderately well implemented**,** structured recruitment processes were strong and advanced strategies such as poaching and external collaboration were less developed**.** This implied that while tea factories are building cognitive diversity, there was still room for strategic enhancement, particularly in competitive sourcing and external talent integration. The findings showed that talent acquisition strategies were present but unevenly implemented, which explained variation in organizational performance suggesting that deeper integration of cognitive diversity practices could further enhance performance outcomes.

The findings are in line with Mensah (2022), who established that structured and competency-based recruitment enhances organizational productivity, innovation, and efficiency. The findings further concur with Shah and Diwan (2023), whose study concluded that proactive talent acquisition practices improve organizational adaptability and operational effectiveness. Similarly, Karanja and Asongu (2023) found that inclusive employer branding attracts cognitively diverse talent and enhances innovation outcomes, supporting the role of diversity-focused recruitment observed in the factories.

The results also agreed with Cheruiyot and Karanja (2024), who reported that diversity-integrated recruitment and employer branding improve retention and operational performance in KTDA factories. Further, Rodic and Slavkovic (2024) support these findings by demonstrating that competency-based recruitment enhances innovation output and knowledge integration. Additionally, Wanjiru and Gichuhi (2022) and Otieno and Muriuki (2023) affirm that effective talent attraction strategies and employer value propositions contribute to improved workforce capability and organizational performance. The results of this analysis are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics on Talent Acquisition Strategies

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
B1: Job advertisements attract applicants with diverse educational or skill backgrounds.	317	1	5	4.21	.810
B2: The selection panel includes people with different knowledge, skills, and ideas.	317	1	5	4.18	.818
B3: Recruitment cycles have increased the variety of problem-solving approaches represented in the factory workforce.	317	1	5	3.82	.890
B4: Recruitment focuses on skills needed for the factory's future growth.	317	1	5	4.14	.873
B5: Referral practices have increased the mix of knowledge and experience within teams.	317	1	5	3.92	.886
B6: Factory at times poaches employees from other organizations.	317	1	5	3.00	1.356
B7: Employees recruited from other competing factories (KTDA managed or private tea factories) bring alternative ways of thinking into the workforce.	317	1	5	3.69	1.196
B8: Talent accessed through external partnerships (such with tea research institute, Tea board of Kenya), introduces new ideas and approaches that differ from existing practice.	317	1	5	3.85	.988
B9: Engagement with other agribusiness or manufacturing firms (outside the tea sector) support long-term talent pipelines that enhance workforce capability and diversity.	317	1	5	3.79	1.074
Grand Mean				**3.84**	**0.99**

Source; Field Data, 2026.

4.1.2 Organizational Performance

The study participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement to statements regarding organizational performance at the factory. Descriptive statistics, including the mean, standard deviation, minimum, and maximum values, were used to summarize the data.

The results showed that the factory complied with statutory requirements of regulatory bodies such as NEMA, ISO, Rainforest Alliance, and Fairtrade (mean = 4.52, SD = 0.629). This suggested that the factories strongly adhered to regulatory standards and certification requirements, which is essential for maintaining product quality, environmental sustainability, and access to international tea markets. Similarly, respondents strongly agreed that the factory paid farmers for green leaf delivered in a timely manner (mean = 4.26, SD = 0.700). This indicated that the factories maintained efficient payment systems that support farmers' livelihoods and strengthen trust between the factories and their green leaf suppliers.

The findings further revealed that the factories maintained consistently high processing throughput levels (mean = 4.12, SD = 0.754). This suggested that the factories had relatively efficient processing capacities of handling large volumes of green leaf while maintaining steady production performance. In addition, respondents agreed that the factory had retained its farmers (mean = 4.01, SD = 0.903). This implied that most farmers continued supplying green leaf to the factories, which may be attributed to satisfactory service delivery, reliable payments, and stable relationships between the factories and farmers.

The results also show that the processing flow from leaf reception to final tea output had remained consistently efficient (mean = 3.96, SD = 0.807). This indicated that the factories had established operational systems that ensured smooth processing activities, thereby minimizing delays and maintaining production efficiency. Similarly, respondents agreed that factories met their set production targets (mean = 3.92, SD = 0.821). This suggested that the factories generally achieved their planned production levels, reflecting effective planning and operational management.

The findings also indicated that the number of registered farmers supplying green leaf continued to grow (mean = 3.92, SD = 0.919). This implied that the factories continued to attract and maintain a growing supplier base, which is important for ensuring a steady supply of raw materials for tea processing. Respondents also moderately agreed that the conversion ratio of green leaf to made tea had shown consistent improvement (mean = 3.91, SD = 0.932). This suggested that improvements in processing efficiency and technology were gradually enhancing better production outcomes.

The results further revealed moderate agreement that sales volume of made tea had been increasing (mean = 3.80, SD = 0.958) and that the price per kilo of made tea sold had been improving (mean = 3.78, SD = 0.929). These findings indicated that although market performance was generally positive, improvements in sales and pricing may be gradual and influenced by external market conditions such as global tea demand and auction prices. Similarly, respondents moderately agreed that the factory had experienced a steady increase in market share (mean = 3.82, SD = 0.913). This suggested that the factories had maintained competitive positions in the tea market, although the growth in market share may not be uniform across all factories.

The findings also showed moderate agreement that the factories received increasing volumes of green leaf every year (mean = 3.59, SD = 1.036). This indicated that although green leaf supply was increasing in some cases; the relatively higher variation suggested that the trend differed across factories depending on factors such as farmer participation, climate conditions, and competition from other buyers. Finally, respondents moderately agreed that the factory had been receiving price awards (mean = 3.54, SD = 1.017). This suggested that while some factories achieved recognition for quality or price performance, such awards were not consistently experienced across all factories.

Overall, a grand mean of 3.93 signified that tea factories were performing at a relatively high level, particularly in operational efficiency, compliance, and stakeholder-related outcomes. However, some areas- especially market-related indicators- showed comparatively lower performance. The standard deviation of 0.87 indicated moderate variability, implying fairly consistent perceptions with few differences across factories. The findings implied that: Tea factories were operationally efficient and compliant; they maintained strong relationships with farmers. However, the factories faced challenges in: market performance and pricing, supply growth and, competitive positioning (awards, market share). Improving these areas could significantly enhance overall organizational performance.

The descriptive results suggested that: Internal processes (efficiency, compliance, coordination) were strong and that, external outcomes (market share, pricing, awards) were relatively weaker. This implied that while cognitive

diversity management strategies were effectively improving internal performance, there was need to strengthen their translation into market competitiveness and impactful performance outcomes. The results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics on Organizational Performance

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
G1: The factory maintains consistently high processing throughput levels.	317	2	5	4.12	.754
G2: Factory meets its set production targets.	317	1	5	3.92	.821
G3: The factory receives increasing volumes of green leaf every year.	317	1	5	3.59	1.036
G4: The number of registered farmers supplying green leaf continues to grow.	317	1	5	3.92	.919
G5: Processing flow from leaf reception to final tea output has remained consistently efficient.	317	1	5	3.96	.807
G6: The conversion ratio of green leaf to made tea has shown consistent improvement.	317	1	5	3.91	.932
G7: There has been a steady increase in market share.	317	1	5	3.82	.913
G8: Price per kilo of made tea sold has been improving.	317	1	5	3.78	.929
G9: The factory pays farmers for green leaf delivered timely.	317	2	5	4.26	.700
G10: The factory complies with statutory requirements of regulatory bodies such as NEMA, ISO, Rainforest Alliance, Fairtrade etc.	317	2	5	4.52	.629
G11: Sales volume of made tea has been increasing.	317	1	5	3.80	.958
G12: The factory has been receiving price awards.	317	1	5	3.54	1.017
G13: The factory has retained its farmers.	317	1	5	4.01	.903
Grand Mean				**3.93**	**0.87**

Source; Field Data, 2026.

4.2 Correlation Analysis

Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (r) was used to establish the relationship between the study variables. The correlation coefficient indicates both the strength and direction of the relationship between variables under investigation. In this study, correlation analysis was conducted to determine the strength of the relationship between talent acquisition strategies and organizational performance of KTDA managed tea factories in Nyamira and Kisii counties.

The correlation coefficient between talent acquisition strategies and organizational performance was: $r = 0.459$ ($p = 0.000$). This indicated that: There was a positive linear relationship between the two variables; as talent acquisition strategies improve, organizational performance also improves. It was concluded that- Talent acquisition strategies were directly associated with better performance outcomes in KTDA-managed tea factories. Using Cohen's 1988 thresholds: 0.30 – 0.59 = Moderate correlation- The relationship was moderate; this implied that talent acquisition was important, but it was not the only determinant of performance; other variables not covered in the study also play a role.

Statistical Significance: p = 0.000 being less than 0.01) meant that the relationship was statistically significant and, the probability that this relationship occurred by chance was extremely low; it was concluded that the relationship between talent acquisition and performance was reliable and generalizable to the population. The positive correlation implied that factories that: use structured recruitment; attract diverse skills and, integrate different problem-solving approaches will tend to achieve better efficiency, realize improved productivity and, enhanced performance outcomes. Correlation results justified further analysis because $r \neq 0$ and was significant; therefore, regression analysis became valid and meaningful; it was concluded that: talent acquisition strategies were a viable predictor of organizational performance in tea factories. Pearson's correlation analysis was applied to measure the degree of association among these variables as presented in Table 5.

Table 5: Correlations Matrix on Talent acquisition Strategies and Organizational Performance

		Talent_ Acquisition	Organizational Performance
Talent Acquisition	Pearson Correlation	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)		
	N	317	
Organizational Performance	Pearson Correlation	.459**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	317	317

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

4.3 Regression Analysis

4.3.1 Effect of Talent Acquisition Strategies on Organizational Performance

The study objective was to determine the effect of talent acquisition strategies on organizational performance. Simple linear regression model was employed to test the effect of talent acquisition strategies on organizational performance.

H_{01}: Talent acquisition strategies do not have statistically significant effect on organizational performance of KTDA managed tea factories in Nyamira and Kisii.

To test the hypothesis H_{01}; a simple linear regression model was applied. The model was specified as:

$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \varepsilon$

Tables 6 (a, b & c) presented the results of simple linear regression analysis of the effect of talent acquisition strategies on organizational performance.

Model summary results showed: R = 0.459- This indicated a moderate positive relationship between talent acquisition strategies and organizational performance. $R^2 = 0.210$; this implied that 21.0% of the variation in organizational performance was explained by talent acquisition strategies; other variations could be explained by factors not covered in this study. Adjusted $R^2 = 0.208$ showed that after adjusting for sample size, the model still explained about 20.8% of the variation in performance, indicating a stable and reliable model. Standard Error = 0.51781- reflected the average deviation of observed values from the regression line and indicated an acceptable level of prediction error.

Although the model established a statistically significant relationship between talent acquisition strategies and organizational performance, the coefficient of determination ($R^2 = 0.210$) indicated that a substantial proportion (79%) of the variation in performance remained unexplained. This moderate explanatory power is expected in agro-processing contexts such as KTDA-managed tea factories, where performance is influenced by a complex interplay of external and internal dynamics. Externally, factors such as global tea prices at the Mombasa auction, exchange rate fluctuations, climatic variability affecting green leaf supply, and changing international quality standards can significantly shape performance outcomes independent of internal human resource practices. Technological constraints- such as aging processing equipment, variability in factory automation levels, and energy reliability- also influence efficiency, throughput, and product quality.

Internally, operational factors including production scheduling, maintenance systems, leaf collection logistics, quality control procedures, cost management practices, and coordination across departments are likely to account for a substantial portion of the unexplained variance. These findings therefore suggest that while talent acquisition strategies- conceptualized as a cognitive diversity management strategy- play a meaningful role in enhancing organizational performance, they operate within a broader system of organizational and environmental influences that collectively determine performance outcomes. The moderate explanatory power of the model therefore highlighted the need for a more integrated analytical framework that incorporates multiple dimensions of organizational capability beyond talent acquisition alone to cater for the other broader set of structural, operational, and environmental factors affecting performance as well. Table 6 (a) shows the model summary.

Table 6 (a): Showing model summary of talent acquisition strategies effect on organizational performance

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.459[a]	.210	.208	.51781

a. Predictors: (Constant), Talent Acquisition

Source; Field Data, 2026

The ANOVA results showed: F (1, 315) = 83.853, p = 0.000**.** Since the calculated F value of 83.853 was greater than the F critical of 3.84 and, p = 0.000 < 0.05; the null hypothesis; H_{01}: Talent acquisition strategies have no statistically significant effect on organizational performance was rejected; it was concluded that: Talent acquisition strategies had a positive and statistically significant effect on organizational performance. This indicated that- the regression model was statistically significant implying that talent acquisition strategies significantly predicted organizational performance and, the model provided a better fit.

The regression results indicated that talent acquisition strategies had a positive and statistically significant effect on organizational performance. This finding is consistent with several empirical studies reviewed. For instance, Mensah (2022) established that competency-based and structured recruitment systems significantly enhance productivity, innovation capacity, and operational efficiency. Similarly, Shah and Diwan (2023) found that proactive talent sourcing and capability-driven selection processes improve product quality, organizational adaptability, and operational performance. Studies by Karanja and Asongu (2023)**,** Cheruiyot and Karanja (2024), and Mutua and Karanja (2024) further support the argument that diversity-oriented recruitment,

employer branding, and structured onboarding enhance teamwork, innovation, and retention, thereby improving organizational outcomes.

However, Bunica (2025) argued that similarity-attraction bias in recruitment may perpetuate homogeneity and limit the benefits of cognitive diversity. This suggests that not all recruitment strategies automatically lead to improved performance; rather, their effectiveness depends on the extent to which they deliberately incorporate diverse knowledge, skills, and perspectives. Therefore, the present finding confirms the dominant view in the literature while also implying that well-structured and diversity-oriented talent acquisition strategies are necessary for improved organizational performance**.** Table 6 (b) shows the ANOVA of talent acquisition strategies and organizational performance.

Table 6 (b): Showing ANOVA of talent acquisition strategies on organizational performance

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	22.483	1	22.483	83.853	.000[b]
	Residual	84.459	315	.268		
	Total	106.942	316			

a. Dependent Variable: Organizational Performance

b. Predictors: (Constant), Talent Acquisition

Source; Field Data, 2026

The coefficient results showed: Constant (β_0 = 2.209, p = 0.000): When talent acquisition strategies are held constant, organizational performance is predicted at 2.209. Talent Acquisition (β_1 = 0.449, p = 0.000): A one-unit increase in talent acquisition strategies leads to a 0.449 increase in organizational performance, the relationship was positive and statistically significant; the standardized coefficient (Beta = 0.459) confirmed a moderate effect size. Furthermore, the t-test result of 9.157 suggested that talent acquisition strategies were over 9 times more significant than the standard error, confirming the strength and reliability of the predictor in the model. The regression coefficients yielded a model of the form: **$Y = 2.209 + 0.449X + \varepsilon$.** Table 6 (c) shows the coefficients of talent acquisition strategies and organizational performance.

Table 6 (c): Showing coefficients of talent acquisition strategies on organizational performance

		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
Model		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	2.209	.191		11.577	.000
	Talent Acquisition	.449	.049	.459	9.157	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Organizational Performance

Source; Field Data, 2026.

5.0 Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusions and study contribution to knowledge

The study concluded that talent acquisition strategies had a statistically significant and practically meaningful effect on organizational performance in KTDA-managed tea factories in Nyamira and Kisii counties. Empirical findings demonstrated a moderate positive relationship between talent acquisition and performance ($r = 0.459$, $\beta = 0.449$, $p < 0.05$), indicating that talent acquisition accounted for a substantial proportion of performance variation across factories. The results further revealed that structured recruitment practices- such as competency-based selection, inclusive recruitment panels, and strategic alignment of hiring with future organizational needs- had contributed to the development of cognitive diversity within the workforce. This diversity enhances internal operational outcomes, particularly in areas such as processing efficiency, regulatory compliance, and coordination of production processes.

However, the study also established that the implementation of talent acquisition strategies was uneven across factories, with advanced practices such as competitive sourcing, cross-industry recruitment, and strategic

external partnerships being underutilized. This inconsistency limits the full realization of cognitive diversity benefits. Additionally, while internal performance indicators were relatively strong, external performance outcomes- such as market share growth, price competitiveness, and recognition through awards- remained comparatively weaker. This suggested that although talent acquisition contributed to improved internal efficiency, its translation into broader market competitiveness was not yet fully optimized. Overall, the study affirmed that talent acquisition strategies were a critical but partially leveraged driver of organizational performance, and that their effectiveness depended on both the depth of implementation and their integration with broader organizational and market-oriented systems.

This study makes a substantive contribution to knowledge by empirically establishing talent acquisition strategies as a critical mechanism for embedding cognitive diversity within organizations and enhancing performance outcomes. The study advances theoretical understanding by extending the Resource-Based View to incorporate cognitive diversity as a strategic intangible resource, thereby refining the conceptualization of human capital in performance research. Empirically, it provides robust quantitative evidence from the Kenyan tea sector- an under-researched context- demonstrating the significant relationship between talent acquisition and organizational performance. Methodologically, the study contributes by operationalizing talent acquisition strategies and linking them to context-specific performance indicators relevant to KTDA-managed factories.

In addition, the study offers a contextual contribution by addressing performance disparities within KTDA factories in Nyamira and Kisii counties, thereby providing insights that are both locally relevant and broadly applicable to similar agro-processing environments. Practically, it informs managerial decision-making and policy formulation by highlighting the strategic importance of talent acquisition in driving efficiency, innovation, and competitiveness. Overall, the study bridges the gap between theory and practice by positioning talent acquisition as a strategic capability through which organizations can leverage cognitive diversity to achieve sustained performance improvements. The study findings should however be interpreted within the context of a single-variable model, and future studies should incorporate multi-variable frameworks to better capture the complexity of performance dynamics in agro-processing industries.

5.2 Implications of Findings

5.2.1 Implications for theory

The study made a significant contribution to the advancement of the Resource-Based View (RBV) by empirically demonstrating that talent acquisition strategies function as mechanisms for developing and deploying intangible human capital resources that influence organizational performance. Specifically, the findings extend RBV by conceptualizing cognitive diversity- embedded within recruitment and selection processes- as a strategic resource that exhibits key VRIN characteristics. Cognitive diversity enhances value through improved problem-solving, innovation, and operational efficiency; it contributes to rarity when organizations attract unique combinations of skills and experiential knowledge; and it is difficult to imitate due to its socially complex and path-dependent nature, shaped by organizational culture, recruitment systems, and learning processes.

Furthermore, the study contextualizes RBV within the agro-processing sector, demonstrating that intangible resources are equally critical in traditional industries such as tea processing, where performance heterogeneity persists despite similar structural and market conditions. At the same time, the relatively moderate explanatory power of talent acquisition strategies ($R^2 = 0.210$) highlights a key limitation of RBV's static orientation, reinforcing arguments in the literature that resource possession alone is insufficient to guarantee sustained competitive advantage. This underscores the need for complementary theoretical perspectives—such as dynamic capabilities- to explain how resources are effectively integrated, reconfigured, and translated into superior performance outcomes. Thus, the study did not only validate RBV but also refined and extended it by emphasizing the role of cognitive diversity and the importance of capability deployment in resource-based performance settings.

5.2.2 Implications for management policy and practice

The findings of the study have important implications for management policy and practice within KTDA-managed tea factories and similar agro-processing organizations. First, the study highlighted the need for a strategic reorientation of talent acquisition from a routine administrative function to a deliberate organizational capability aimed at enhancing cognitive diversity and performance. Managers should move beyond traditional recruitment criteria focused on technical qualifications and instead prioritize the attraction and integration of individuals with diverse knowledge bases, problem-solving approaches, and experiential backgrounds. Second, the uneven implementation of advanced talent acquisition practices- such as competitive sourcing, cross-sector recruitment, and strategic partnerships with research and industry institutions- suggests the need for more

standardized and coordinated talent acquisition strategies across factories. Strengthening these areas would enhance knowledge inflows, innovation capacity, and adaptability.

Third, the findings indicated a critical gap between internal operational efficiency and external market performance. This implied that talent acquisition strategies should be more closely aligned with broader organizational objectives, including innovation, market positioning, and value addition. Managers should therefore integrate talent acquisition with other organizational systems such as training, team configuration, and leadership practices to ensure that cognitive diversity translates into tangible market outcomes. At the policy level, KTDA and relevant regulatory bodies should consider developing sector-wide frameworks and guidelines to support strategic talent acquisition, promote knowledge sharing across factories, and enhance the overall competitiveness of the tea sector. Ultimately, the study underscores that effective talent acquisition is not only a human resource function but a strategic lever for improving both operational efficiency and market performance.

5.3 Recommendations for future studies

The study opens several avenues for future research. Given that talent acquisition strategies explained only a portion of the variation in organizational performance; future studies should incorporate additional variables such as leadership practices, innovation systems, technological capabilities, and organizational culture to develop more comprehensive explanatory models; moreover, future studies on same variables could incorporate a moderating variable such as managerial attributes or organizational culture among others to test the effect on the relationships thereby advancing both theoretical development and practical application. Longitudinal research designs are also recommended to examine how talent acquisition strategies evolve over time and influence sustained performance outcomes. Additionally, future research should consider more variables within the domain of cognitive diversity management strategies and study them in one unified model; such variables could include team composition strategies, communication strategies among others and test their effect on performance. Further studies could expand the geographical scope to include other KTDA zones or comparative analyses across different agro-processing sectors to enhance generalizability. The use of mixed-methods approaches, incorporating qualitative techniques such as interviews and case studies, would also provide deeper insights into the mechanisms through which talent acquisition influences performance.

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