

SUB-THEME
**ASSESSMENT AS AN INSTITUTIONAL REFORMING TOOL IN EDUCATION
AND CIVIL SERVICE**

TOPIC
**ASSESSMENT OF ANNUAL PERFORMANCE EVALUATION REPORT OF THE
NATIONAL BUSINESS AND TECHNICAL EXAMINATIONS BOARD (NABTEB)
AS A TOOL FOR REFORMING CIVIL SERVICE SYSTEM IN NIGERIA**

BY

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Abstract

Performance assessment of civil servants plays a vital role in the implementation of employee promotion policy of the Federal government of Nigeria. One of the most fundamental features of any human resource management that is relevant to individual and organizational growth is performance appraisal. In order to enhance the performance of civil officers, the Nigerian government introduced the Annual Performance Evaluation Report (APER) which serves as the basis for regular evaluation of the performance of the civil servants. The main objective of the APER is to give feedback to the employee on ways to improve subsequent performance, thereby enhancing productivity and efficiency in an organization's performance. Despite its significance, there seems to be inherent subjectivity that is associated with its implementation. For instance, the appraisal ratings are sometimes inflated to favour certain employees while others are not properly rated. This study investigated the extent to which the NABTEB APER correlates with employees' promotion examination. The objective of the study was to obtain formative data that could be used for policy-oriented review of staff assessments. One research question was answered and two hypotheses tested. The study adopted a survey research design employing the quantitative approach. The population comprised all employees of NABTEB in the Senior Cadre. One hundred and eighty-two employees of Senior cadres were used. Three instruments were used: NABTEB Employees' APER Score Sheets, Promotion Score Sheets and Questionnaire on Employees Perception (Cronbach Alpha = 0.82). Data were analysed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation, Frequency, Percentage, Mean, Standard Deviation and t-test. The findings revealed that NABTEB APER is not a strong predictor of promotion examination score. The study also revealed that on the average, the employees perceived the APER form as being objective. It was therefore recommended that similar studies should be replicated in other establishments for a more embracing reform of the civil service system.

KEYWORDS: Assessment, NABTEB, Annual Performance Evaluation Report,
Civil Service, Senior Cadre Employees

Introduction

In Nigeria, the civil service was established to take responsibilities for the initiation and implementation of government policies. Human resource is of central importance to the achievement of any organisational goal. The organisation's success or failure is largely dependent on the quality of employees. As a result, corporate organisations and governments recognised the need for the employees to possess the requisite skills, knowledge and competencies needed for the execution of goals of their establishment. The main objective of personnel management is to utilize the human resources in an optimal manner so that targets can be achieved effectively and efficiently. In order to achieve this, the civil servant is assessed from time to time through Performance Appraisal. Assessing performance in the Nigerian civil service is largely hinged on the Annual Performance Evaluation Report (APER).

APER also known as Performance Appraisal is a system of setting employees individual targets, monitoring those targets, measuring the outcomes through evaluation by rewarding the employee's performance positively or negatively. By implication, an appraisal is the evaluation of employees' work (Obisi, 2011). Assessment of employee's performance is important in every establishment in Nigeria. Therefore, appraisal calls for vital procedure in order to actualise the stipulated objectives. Civil service has prominent roles to play in service delivery and in ensuring adequate capacity of the workforce through appraisal system.

The appraisal of employees has the advantage of facilitating an organisation to position the workforce in the jobs for which they are best suited to improve productivity. Knowledgeable and competent employees are regarded as key assets for organisation to survive and sustain its competitive advantage. Therefore, organisational performance is enhanced through employee-oriented human resource practices that can build up employees' capability,

commitment and productivity (Posthuma, Masimova & Campion, 2013). Hence, APER defines the methods and processes used by organisations to enhance work design, process and feedback. The effectiveness of the civil service in terms of service delivery is a key factor in achieving the goals. Thus, performance appraisal is a significant instrument in enhancing civil service performance. In the view of Sonnentag (2003) APER is the actions that expedite the accomplishment of organisational goals, delivery of the products and services.

It has been observed that issue of accuracy and fairness in APER is one of the key interests in research. APER is seen as the method by which the performance and productivity of each worker is measured in order to determine his or her contributions to the effort of the organisation towards the achievement of the set goals and objectives (Otun & Anam, 2018). The aim is to ascertain the job performance of each employee towards the achievement of the establishment objectives. APER is also carried out for the purpose of promotion and transfer to a new job tasks and positions within an organisation. It is deployed in determining the weaknesses and strengths of employees in order to re-enforce the strengths and improve on the weaknesses for the overall benefit of both the employees and the organisation (Ijewereme & Benson, 2013).

APER is a periodic exercise which involves a systematic evaluation of an employee's performance on the job for the purpose of determining the employees' efficiency, skills, improvement over time, potentials and weakness for the purpose of his development, extraction of information for human resources development, decisions and policies (Jain & Garg, 2013). The improvement over time is often rewarded by financial and other benefits (Ismail, Majid, Jibrin-Bida & Joarder, 2019).

The main aim of performance appraisal system is to evaluate employees fairly. However, APER is sometimes a problematic component in human resource management as opined by

Messah and Kamencu (2011). They reckoned that APER can sometimes be ineffective thereby having a destructive influence on employees-supervisors' relationship in most organisations. In the same vein, Dogarawa (2011) emphasised that performance appraisal is not objectively practised in some Ministries, Extra-Ministerial Departments and Agencies due to some factors inherent in the assessment process. Echu (2010) remarked that most promotions, appointments and job placements are based on political affiliation, ethnicity, religious inclination and reference of the appointee to the people that matter. He added that most of those employees so promoted or appointed may not necessarily be competent on the job. Often times, the lack of objectivity in rating arises from the established relationship between the supervisors (who do the rating) and the subordinates (who are rated).

According to Noe, Hollenbeck, Gerhart and Wright (2004), APER is affected by subjectivity and influenced by some major errors, such as halo or horn effects, leniency or strictness, central tendency, race, age and gender biases. Halo effect reflects the tendency of the supervisor to unduly give high score to subordinate while the horn effect which is opposite of the halo effect is a rating error that occurs when the rater responds to one negative aspect by rating the employee low in other aspects. The leniency error is another appraisal error where the supervisors have the tendency to rate subordinates higher and in strictness error, the supervisors may be too harsh to rate virtually all the subordinates with very low rating. The central tendency error occurs when superiors evaluate all subordinates as average performers even if the actual performances of employees vary. Another issue is rating bias due to gender. Studies have shown that men seem to receive higher ratings compared to women, given the same performance levels (Bauer & Baltes, 2002). In subjective performance evaluations, women are expected to receive more favourable ratings, as the probability of female evaluator increases (Maas & Torres-Gonzalez, 2010). Such appraisal errors are associated with reliability, validity and rating biases.

Similarly, Mustapha (2008) analysed the challenges facing the effective use of the APER to include poor objectivity, poor feedback to employees and fear of reprisals in the case of adverse reports being issued on subordinates and even poor knowledge of the role of performance appraisal as a tool of management by both workers and superiors. He recommended that employees' assessment should be done more than once in a year by direct superiors in order to measure outputs rather than just inputs. He added that the assessment should generate training for improvement apart from promotion while rewards should be attached to performance or non-performance so as to propel staff to work harder and discourage them from dysfunctional work ethics.

The National Business and Technical Examinations Board (NABTEB), is one of the assessment bodies in Nigeria. In NABTEB, APER is used for promotion, award, confirmation, discipline, annual increment, redeployment or further training. The structure of Board's appraisal instrument is designed for two categories of staff, the junior and senior staff. The junior and senior staff are on Consolidated Research and Allied Institution Salary Scale (CONRAISS) 01- 05 and 06 – 15 respectively. The senior staff appraisal form is divided into nine parts. Part 1 captures the employees' personal records and particulars; part 2 contains staff contribution to the Board, detailed job description, training attended and appraisee's comments on job performance; part 3 list the appraisee's assigned duties/responsibilities in order of importance; part 4 consist of eight criteria in which the employees are being appraised; part 5 includes the employee's strengths and weaknesses as well as the assessment of employee's potentials for growth; Part 6 deals with the overall evaluation of the appraisee; part 7, contains the appraisees' name, signature and dates; Part 8 shows the recommendation by the Head of Department which include promotion, award, annual incremental, need for further training, redeployment or disciplinary action and finally,

part 9 shows the Head of Department's concluding comments on the employee being assessed with name, signature, date and designation.

Statement of the Problem

Lack of effective performance appraisal system is a major problem in human resource management in Nigerian public sector. No doubt, this hinders the growth of the organisation and ultimately undermines national development. This therefore calls for the objective measurement capacity of APER into question. Ironically, reports indicate that many civil servants who are less productive are rated high while the more productive are rated low in APER. As a result of this anomaly, some employees perceive the APER as an annual exercise that lacks objectivity. This impediment to performance appraisal has the tendency to frustrate the efforts of the government at all levels in repositioning the civil service for better service delivery. It is against this backdrop that the study seeks to assess the NABTEB APER as an effective instrument for reforming civil service in Nigeria.

Objective of the Study

1. To evaluate Senior Employees' Perception of APER as an effective instrument for Promotion
2. To ascertain if there is a significant difference in the Perception of Male and Female Senior Employees on APER as an effective instrument for Promotion.
3. To determine the Correlation between Senior Employees' Performance in APER and Promotion examination.

Research Question

What is Senior Employees' Perception of APER as an effective instrument for Promotion?

Hypothesis

1. There is no significant difference in the Perception of Male and Female Senior Employees on APER as an effective instrument for Promotion.

2. There is no significant relationship between Senior Employees' Performance in APER and Promotion Examination.

Significance of the Study

The study will improve the APER system for effective civil service delivery in Nigeria. The findings of the study will enable the employees to build confidence on Annual Performance Evaluation Report. It will also sensitise the civil servants on the importance of APER. The study will enable NABTEB to identify inadequacies inherent in APER. Finally, the findings from this study will be of great benefit to researchers to identify gaps not addressed by this study which will create grounds for further research.

Methodology

Research Design

This study adopted a survey research design.

Population

The population of the study comprised all senior employees of NABTEB in the Senior Cadre.

Sample and Sampling Technique

A sample of 182 out of 191 Senior Staff who participated in the 2017 NABTEB Promotion exercise was used for the study. This is because 4 employees retired from service in the year under study and 5 questionnaires were not returned.

Instrumentation

Three instruments were used for the study, namely:

1. Senior Staff 2017 APER Scores Sheets.
2. Senior Staff 2017 Promotion Examination Scores Sheets.
3. Questionnaire on the Perception of the Effectiveness of APER (QPEAPER).

Questionnaire on the Perception of the Effectiveness of APER (QPEAPER)

QPEAPER was developed by the researchers. It consists of two sections: A and B. Section A comprised the demographic profile of respondents with seven (7) items; Section B contains fifteen items that sought the perception of respondents on the effectiveness of the APER. Senior staff employees were required to tick (✓) in any column that best describe the extent they agree with the statements on a four-point scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD).

Validation of Instrument

QPEAPER was validated by experts and a reliability coefficient of 0.82 was obtained using Cronbach Alpha.

Data Collection

The Senior Staff 2017 APER and Promotion Examination Scores Sheets were collected from the Board's Administration Department. The questionnaire was administered and collected by the researchers and trained research assistants.

Data Analysis

The APER and Promotion Examination Scores were standardised using Z-scores and T-scores for uniformity. Data was analysed using, Frequency, Percentage, Mean, Standard Deviation, t-test and Pearson Product Moment Correlation.

Results

Research Question

What is Employees' Perception of NABTEB APER as an effective instrument for Promotion?

Table 1: Employees' Perception of NABTEB APER as an effective instrument for Promotion

S/N	Statement	SA (%)	A (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	Mean	Std. Dev.	Decision
1	NABTEB APER achieves its goal effectively.	39(21.4)	113(62.1)	17(9.3)	13(7.1)	2.98	.772	
2	The contents of APER form are adequately covered.	55(30.2)	104(57.1)	19(10.4)	4(2.2)	3.15	.688	
3	The criteria listed in APER are effectively linked to the job description.	65(35.7)	84(46.2)	27(14.8)	6(3.3)	3.14	.788	
4	The feedback from APER helps to effectively identify professional strengths and weaknesses of staff.	62(34.1)	80(44.0)	32(17.6)	8(4.4)	3.08	.831	
5	APER ratings can be influenced by gifts from the subordinate.	36(19.8)	65(35.7)	50(27.5)	31(17.0)	2.42	.992	
6	Specific performance criteria are not clearly identified in the APER form.	23(12.6)	61(33.5)	82(45.1)	16(8.8)	2.50	.826	
7	APER is an essential tool for Board's overall development.	50(27.5)	103(56.6)	25(13.7)	4(2.2)	3.09	.703	
8	The structure of APER form gives room for the ratee to be aware of their performance.	66(36.3)	98(53.8)	14(7.7)	4(2.2)	3.24	.687	
9	The APER differentiates productive from less productive employees.	41(22.5)	92(50.5)	34(18.7)	15(8.2)	2.87	.854	
10	APER is a mere formality rather than identifying gaps in employees' performance.	17(9.3)	52(28.6)	77(42.3)	36(19.8)	2.73	.887	
11	The application of APER in the Board's promotion exercise is satisfactory.	51(28.0)	82(45.1)	34(18.7)	15(8.2)	2.93	.892	
12	APER does not serve as a fair assessment tool for promotion of employees.	25(13.7)	43(23.6)	82(45.1)	32(17.6)	2.66	.924	
13	There is opportunity for employees to appeal if they are not satisfied with the rating.	48(26.4)	105(57.7)	24(13.2)	5(2.7)	3.08	.709	
14	Tribalism affiliation does not influence APER rating.	32(17.6)	72(39.6)	50(27.5)	28(15.4)	2.59	.952	
15	Gender consideration influences APER rating.	18(9.9)	32(17.6)	70(38.5)	62(34.1)	2.97	.957	

Decision: Mean value ≥ 2.50 signifies 'Accepted'; Mean value < 2.50 signifies 'Rejected'

Based on the analysis of data in Table 1, it was revealed that out of the 182 respondents, 83.5% agreed that NABTEB APER achieves its goal effectively, 87.3% agreed that the contents of APER form are adequately covered, 81.9% agreed that the criteria listed in APER are effectively linked to the job description, 78.1% agreed that the feedback from APER

helps to effectively identify professional strengths and weaknesses of staff. However, 44.5% disagreed that APER ratings can be influenced by gifts from the subordinate while 53.9% disagreed that Specific performance criteria are not clearly identified in the APER form. In a similar vein, 153 of the respondents representing 84.1% agreed that APER is an essential tool for Board's overall development, 90.1% agreed that the structure of APER form gives room for the ratee to be aware of their performance.

Seventy-three percent (73%) agreed that the APER differentiates productive from less productive employees, while 62.1% disagreed that APER is a mere formality rather than identifying gaps in employees' performance and 73.1% agreed that the application of APER in the Board's promotion exercise is satisfactory. With respect to weaknesses of APER, 62.7% disagreed that APER does not serve as a fair assessment tool for promotion of employees while 84.1% agreed that there is opportunity for employees to appeal if they are not satisfied with the rating. Also, 104 respondents representing 57.2% agreed that tribalism affiliation does not influence APER rating and 72.6% disagreed that Gender consideration influences APER rating.

Hypothesis 1

There is no significant difference in the Perception of Male and Female Senior Employees on NABTEB APER as an effective instrument for Promotion.

Table 2: Independent t-test on the Perception of Male and Female Employees on NABTEB APER as an effective instrument for Promotion

Group Statistics								
Trade	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	df	t	Sig. (p)	Decision
Male	104	43.57	6.459	0.633	180	0.348	0.728	NS
Female	78	43.26	5.241	0.593				

NS = Not Significant

Table 2 shows that there is no significant difference in the Perception of Male and Female Senior Employees on NABTEB APER as an effective instrument for Promotion ($t = 0.348$, $p = 0.728$, $P > 0.05$). This implies that Male and Female Senior Employees of NABTEB are not different in their Perception of NABTEB APER as an effective instrument for Promotion. Therefore, the null hypothesis which stated that there is no significant difference in the Perception of Male and Female Senior Employees on NABTEB APER as an effective instrument for Promotion was retained.

Hypothesis 2

There is no significant relationship between Senior Employees' Performance in APER and Promotion Examination.

Table 3: Relationship between Senior Employees' Performance in APER and Promotion Examination

		NABTEB APER	Promotion Examination
NABTEB APER	Pearson Correlation	1	0.142
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.055
	N	182	182
Promotion Examination	Pearson Correlation	0.142	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.055	
	N	182	182

Table 3 shows a positive low relationship between Employees' Performance in NABTEB APER and Performance in Promotion Examination with calculated Pearson correlation coefficient ($r = 0.142$) and p-value 0.055 testing at alpha level of 0.05. Since $p > 0.05$, it reveals that there is no significant correlation between Employees' Performance in NABTEB APER and Performance in Promotion Examination. This implies that NABTEB APER is not a good predictor of Performance in Promotion examination. Hence the null hypothesis which stated that there is no significant relationship between Senior Employees' Performance in APER and Promotion Examination is retained.

Discussion of Findings

The findings revealed that the majority of the senior employees perceived the APER as an effective instrument for promotion. This finding corroborates the findings of Ikemefuna and Chidi (2012) who found that workers have an optimistic view of performance appraisal as a means for promoting, evaluating and equitably compensating employees. It however, negates the view of Dogarawa (2011) who emphasised that APER is not objectively practised in some Ministries, Extra-Ministerial Departments and Agencies due to some factors inherent in the assessment process. The findings also revealed that APER ratings can be influenced by gifts from the subordinate. This finding supports the views of Gilbert (2006) who noted that the APER system is constantly being abused by favouring some employees over others either due to personal relationships or tribalism thereby making the system lose its credibility.

However, the findings further showed that various problems that affect the effectiveness of APER such as tribalism affiliation and gender did not influence APER rating in NABTEB as indicated by the respondents. This finding negates the findings of Maas & Torres-Gonzalez (2010) who reported that gender is a salient factor during supervisor-subordinate relationships. It further negates the findings of Gilbert (2006), who reported issue of tribalism in appraisal performance.

The result shows that there was no significant difference in the Perception of Male and Female Senior Employees on NABTEB APER as an effective instrument for Promotion. This implies that both the male and female senior employees agreed that APER is an effective instrument for Promotion. This result negates the finding of Hind and Baruch (1997) who reported that gender variances were found in the cognitive bases of employee work-oriented attitudes and these were reflected through measures of perceptions of the utility and relevance of formal organizational appraisal systems.

The study further revealed that there was a positive low correlation which was not significant between Employees' Performance in NABTEB APER and Promotion Examination. This means that the employees with high scores in APER had low scores in Promotion Examination. This result could be attributed to the fact that some of the staff who at their point of entry into NABTEB with low qualification did not deem it fit to build on their skills to have a proficient knowledge of the job with innovations through further training which could prepare them intellectually for promotion examination.

Conclusion

The study concludes that APER helps NABTEB as an organisation to accomplish its objectives by judging effectiveness of the employees. However, it discovered that APER rating could be subjected to inducement and is not a predictor of promotion examination.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Employees should be encouraged for further training.
2. Since APER is not a predictor of promotion examination therefore, APER should be reviewed.
3. Similar studies should be replicated in other establishments for a more embracing reform of the civil service system.

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