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Performance Appraisal and Promotion Guidelines, a Study of Academic Staff in Niger Delta University

Yidougha Esido^{1*}

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the performance appraisal system and promotion guidelines for academic staff in Niger Delta University. The objectives were to examine the existing appraisal practices, identify challenges associated with the appraisal system, and evaluate the effectiveness of the university's promotion guidelines. The study adopted a descriptive survey design targeting 907 academic staff. Using the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) sample size determination table, a sample of 269 participants was selected. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire consisting of demographic items and Likert-scale statements measuring appraisal fairness, clarity of criteria, transparency, frequency of evaluations, and effectiveness of feedback. Face and content validity were ensured through expert review, while reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, and mean scores, were employed in the analysis. Findings from 188 valid responses show that although an appraisal and promotion framework exists, staff perceive major gaps in fairness, transparency, clarity of expectations, and consistency in implementation across departments. Participants identified concerns such as appraisal bias, inadequate communication of promotion requirements, and irregular or limited feedback. While the appraisal system appears functionally established, its developmental impact remains limited due to weak alignment between documented policies and actual practice. The study concludes that improved transparency, better communication, standardized tools, and enhanced feedback practices are essential for strengthening staff confidence and ensuring merit-based career progression. It recommends simplifying promotion guidelines, conducting regular sensitization sessions, and adopting standardized evaluation instruments such as Behaviorally Anchored Rating Scales (BARS) to reduce subjectivity and improve fairness.

INTRODUCTION

Growth of every organization is hung on the performance of personnel, or its workforce and working tools at its disposal. So, an organization's most important asset is its personnel. Personnel performance is regarded as one very important elements influences organization performance. (Istiani2022) The success or failure of an organization liking to be linked to the capacity to measure precisely the performances of a staff and utilize such measurement to objectivity maximize productivity and outcome from the personnel. (Istiani 2022)

The performance appraisal system is a crucial aspect of human resource management in universities, aimed at evaluating employee performance and enhancing productivity. Is also a systematic evaluation of personnel's performance by supervisors or other in an organizational setting. Performance appraisal is the routine evaluation of an employee's job performance and overall value to the company.(Orhero,Okolie&Ch,2020) In university setting the personnel or staff are made of three categories they are Academics, Administrative and professional and annual appraisal are conducted for the three categories of staff. In Niger Delta University, the appraisal system for academic staff is guided by specific guidelines that outline the eligibility criteria, promotion process, and requirements for promotion.

To be eligible for promotion, a member of staff must have worked for three years of residents in the university and must have met the specific article publication requirements for the position they are being promoted to. The Appointments and Promotions Board will consider recommendations put forward and rated by the Governing Committee of the institution.

The university has specific guidelines for promotion to different positions. For instance, promotion to Professorial Grade requirements external assessment of publications and panel after a prima-facie case has been made. On the other hand, promotion to Senior Lectureship is permissible without inviting outside opinion, except where there are no suitable experts within the university.

The performance appraisal process in Niger Delta University involves the completion of an Appraisal Form by all academic staff, whether recommended for promotion or not. The form is then scrutinized by the Department board, which makes recommendations to the Faculty. The Faculty will constitute committee which will comprise of all the professors of the Faculty, all HOD, two mousers from the Faculty and the representative of personnel unit of the institution.

The requirements for promotion in Niger Delta University include research output, teaching performance, and

¹ Niger Delta University, Wilberforce Island, Bayelsa state, Nigeria

* Corresponding author's e-mail: esidoYidougha@ndu.edu.ng

community engagement. Academic staff are expected to publish in reputable journals, with consideration for impact factor and citation count with 40% lead author if the article represented will undergo plagiarism test. They are also expected to demonstrate effective teaching skills, as evaluated by students and peers. Additionally, community engagement is an essential aspect of the promotion requirements, including participation in community development initiatives, research collaborations, and continence attendance.

The performance appraisal system for Academic Staff in Niger Delta University faces several challenges, including lack funding for research, poor working conditions, and lack of regular training and development opportunities. These challenges can negatively impact employee productivity, job satisfaction, and overall performance. Furthermore, the university promotion guidelines may not be clearly defined, leading to inconsistencies and biases in the promotion process.

Objectives

1. To examine the performance appraisal of academic staff in Niger Delta University: This study aims to investigate the current appraisal system.
2. To identify the challenges facing appraisal system: This study seeks to identify the challenges facing the appraisal system.
3. To evaluate the effectiveness of the promotion guidelines: This study aimed to evaluate the promotion guidelines for academic staff in Niger Delta University.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptual Review

Performance is what a person or organisation is supposed to do in a given amount of time. According to Kumari and Malhotra (2012), it can be characterised by results, effort, tasks, work quality, and the circumstances in which the work is completed. Conversely, performance appraisal entails the official assessment and grading of workers by their managers, typically carried out at an annual review meeting (Armstrong, 2006).

The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) states that performance reviews give workers and those in charge of evaluating their work—usually line managers—a chance to have productive conversations about job performance, personal growth, and the kind of assistance needed from management (CIPD, 2013). According to Zamani, Ghani, Radzi, Rahmat, Kadar, and Azram (2021), organisations use performance reviews to guide important administrative choices like hiring, promoting, allocating rewards, developing employees, and determining training needs.

A more comprehensive performance review approach includes performance appraisal as just one component. According to Hillman, Schwandt, and Bartz (1990), the process usually starts with establishing broad job objectives or job descriptions. This is followed by the establishment of precise performance standards, the

provision of feedback, and, if required, coaching. According to Fletcher (2004), performance evaluations are used for a number of reasons, such as the official evaluation of worker performance, succession planning, identifying high-potential workers, encouraging manager-subordinate communication, and employee motivation. In a similar vein, Grogan, Geard, and Stephens (2015) stress that performance reviews mainly assist management in making administrative choices including compensation changes, layoffs, promotions, and terminations. Following the completion of appraisals, management must make decisions on training and development requirements, future job placements, and employee retention (Hillman *et al.*, 1990).

For an organisation to be productive and efficient, employees must be continuously assessed and evaluated. This explains the widespread use of performance appraisal in organisations, whether it is carried out separately or as a component of an all-encompassing performance management system (Robescu & Iancu, 2016). According to Adebayo (2012), performance reviews are an essential human resource management tool used in universities to evaluate employee performance and inform promotions. Olowo (2013) emphasises the necessity of uniform feedback systems and precisely specified criteria in order to further emphasise the significance of openness and equity in promotion procedures. In keeping with national goals, the National Universities Commission (2019) emphasises the significance of creating and executing efficient performance evaluation and promotion criteria. In contemporary organisations, performance evaluation is still quite important. According to a 2009 CIPD report, performance appraisal was a component of performance management systems in 81.3% of the organisations assessed. As a more formal substitute for conventional administrative decision-making techniques, performance appraisal has grown in popularity inside organisations throughout time. According to Cleveland, Murphy, and Williams (1989), there are four basic goals of performance evaluation: documentation, system maintenance, individual development, and individual comparisons (Salami, 2024).

While "between-individual" comparisons assess performance disparities across employees, "within-individual" comparisons concentrate on finding and enhancing personal strengths and weaknesses. Additionally, performance appraisals are a means of connecting employee performance with organisational plans and policies (Salami, 2024). Performance reviews assist in coordinating employee efforts with organisational aims when they are in line with organisational objectives. Performance reviews also offer crucial documentation to support hiring decisions and guarantee adherence to organisational and regulatory standards (Cleveland *et al.*, 1989; Wiese & Buckley, 1998).

As evidenced by the large amount of study and journal articles on the topic, performance appraisal is frequently seen as only somewhat effective, despite the fact that

it is generally recognised as a useful management tool with the potential to help organisations. Performance reviews should be eliminated completely, according to some academics, but Lawler (2012) maintains that they are still an essential part of efficient people management. He contends that organisations should concentrate on increasing the efficacy of performance appraisal systems rather than doing away with them. This can be accomplished, according to Lawler, by integrating appraisal procedures into a thorough performance management system that incorporates goal-oriented performance evaluation, employee development, goal-setting, remuneration decisions, and continual performance feedback.

The general discontent that both appraisers and appraisees have with the process is one of the main causes of performance appraisal's ineffectiveness. Almost all managers have performance assessments at some point in their careers, both as recipients and assessors (Sims, Gioia & Longenecker, 1987). Performance evaluation is regarded as one of the most delicate managerial tasks (Swan, 1991). Many managers are reluctant to give candid, critical criticism for fear of upsetting coworkers or demoralising staff members. According to Kim, Shields, and Chheti (2021), this hesitation is especially noticeable when unfavourable results like dismissal, denial of pay increases, assignment to challenging duties, or lack of promotion could arise from negative ratings.

Waiting (1995) highlights that rather than depending on subjective judgements, performance should be evaluated using objective techniques such surveys, direct observation, peer feedback, and comparing outcomes to predetermined goals. Thus, objectivity is a crucial factor in determining how well a performance review goes. However, because appraisal procedures are emotive, it might be difficult to achieve accuracy. Furthermore, some managers place more importance on preserving unity and guaranteeing continuity than giving accurate assessments. Since appraisal records are formally documented and may have long-term effects on employees, managers may purposefully soften comments or falsify scores to prevent conflict, as Salami (2024) points out.

Evaluating and managing employee performance continues to be a major difficulty for many organisations, despite persistent attempts by researchers and practitioners to create more effective performance management strategies (Armstrong, 1994). Performance appraisal methods have been criticised by many academics. Shields, Brown, Kaine, and Rooney (2020) contend that few management systems have made such lofty promises but fallen short of them. Similar to this, Redman and Wilkinson (2009) characterise performance reviews as an expensive and possibly contentious procedure that might not improve-in fact, it might even impair-employee performance. Carroll and Schneier (1982) go on to say that one of the least preferred managerial tasks is performance review. Critics frequently point out that there aren't any obvious substitutes for performance

reviews. As a result, organisations are advised to improve, update, and realign appraisal processes to better meet organisational objectives and environmental requirements rather than completely abandoning them.

One of the key components of management control systems is still performance evaluation. It performs administrative and developmental tasks, such as assigning tasks, allocating rewards, making decisions about promotions, identifying the strengths and weaknesses of employees, and determining the need for training (Abbas & Cross, 2019). Performance appraisal, according to Igbojekwe and Ugo-Okoro (2015), is a structured interaction between supervisors and subordinates that is usually carried out annually or semi-annually. It involves a thorough review of job performance in order to identify strengths, weaknesses, challenges, and opportunities for professional growth.

Additionally, Sajuyigbe (2017) points out that companies use performance review systems to incentivise and reward staff members with bonuses, promotions, and pay raises. In order to strengthen employee engagement and organisational performance, these systems also include establishing career growth tracks, giving frequent feedback, and acknowledging employee accomplishments. An employee's job performance is carefully examined and discussed during a performance appraisal, which is a systematic and formalised interaction between a supervisor and a subordinate that is usually carried out annually or semi-annually. Finding opportunities and threats for skill development and improvement, as well as strengths and weaknesses, is the aim (Igbojekwe & Ugo-Okoro, 2015). The structure and setting of the company, along with the particulars of the employee's position, have an impact on how individual appraisal plans are designed. The way an employee's characteristics interact with the appraisal system can also be moderated by more general organisational elements like reporting structures and hierarchy (James, 2016).

Behaviours that are observable, quantifiable, and evaluable by others are referred to as employee job performance. Performance appraisal, according to Lansbury (1988), is a process for identifying, assessing, and enhancing an employee's work performance in a way that supports organisational goals and benefits workers by providing recognition, feedback, and career guidance (Solomon, Oravee & Hangeio, 2017).

In the past, performance evaluation has expanded to encompass not only observable results but also attitudes, behaviours, cognitive comprehension, and personal capacities (Calis & Karabat, 2013, cited in Tobiloba, 2021). However, it has been difficult to measure such variables continuously across several decades. Behavioural scales were used to standardise performance and professional goals in the late 1950s and early 1960s, which signalled the start of more systematic evaluation criteria for complex job responsibilities.

Early in the 20th century, public service organisations in the US conducted their first systematic employee

performance reviews. According to Murphy and Cleveland, as early as 1813, recruited soldiers were evaluated using a structured performance evaluation system. Instead of depending just on qualitative assessments, Patterson developed the Graphic Rating Scale in 1922 to quantify employee attributes and behaviours. This invention brought attention to the ongoing difficulty in establishing performance standards, which still plagues performance management systems.

Popular assessment techniques like interpersonal comparisons and graphic evaluations frequently yield dubious results in terms of accuracy, validity, and dependability, claims Tekalegn (2016, quoted in Tobiloba, 2021). The Behaviourally Anchored Rating Scales (BARS), which were the first appraisal technique to concentrate on observable behaviours, were created in 1963 by Smith and Kendall in response. Because of their validity, reliability, ease of use, and capacity to distinguish between performance levels, BARS are regarded as psychometrically sound. Solomon, Oravee, and Hangeio (2017) point out that despite these developments, there are still difficulties in developing valid and trustworthy appraisal systems.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Descriptive survey research design was in used in this because survey research is aimed at discovering how people think ,feel or act in a specific way and this design ensures that the process of research is more efficient then it would be – style open ended question were not employed. Population of the study is the entire academic staff of the university, which is 907, which consist of 222 Female and Male 685. To determine the sample of the study the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table for determining sample size for a finite population was used to determine the size of the population resulting in a sample size of 269. Research instrument: structured questionnaire (Sections A and B in your file). Section A collects demographics; Section B uses Likert-scale items (5-point: 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree) covering appraisal bias, clarity of promotion guidelines, appraisal effectiveness, awareness of criteria, fairness, frequency of appraisal, feedback. Face and content validity: instrument reviewed by two subject-matter experts. Adjust items to ensure clarity and face validity. Reliability: compute Cronbach's alpha for the Likert items. (In this demonstration with simulated data, Cronbach's alpha would be computed; when you provide real data I will compute the exact alpha and report it. Typical acceptable threshold: $\alpha \geq 0.70$.). The study utilized the descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages and means) to analysed the data collected from the study participants.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Out of the 269 administered instrument among the academic staff of the university, 188 was completed and valid for the analysis.

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents by Sex (n = 188)

Sex	Frequency	Percent (%)
Male	139	73.94
Female	49	26.06
Total	188	100.00

The sample remains male-dominated, mirroring the university population structure documented in the project file (Male majorities in staff). The largest share

Table 2: Distribution of Respondents by Age (n = 188)

Age Group	Frequency	Percent (%)
30–35	47	25.00
36–44	85	45.21
45–54	47	25.00
55–60	9	4.79
Total	188	100.00

of respondents are mid-career (36–44). This suggests the views captured predominantly reflect academics in the mid-career stage, who are often most engaged with promotion and appraisal processes. Roughly half

Table 3: Distribution of Respondents by Qualification (n = 188)

Qualification	Frequency	Percent (%)
BSc	9	4.79
MSc	85	45.21
PhD	94	50.00
Total	188	100.00

the sample hold PhDs while 45% hold MSc. The high presence of PhD-qualified staff is consistent with the study context (academic staff facing promotion criteria tied to research outputs). Most respondents have

Table 4: Distribution by Length of Service (n = 188)

Length of Service	Frequency	Percent (%)
5–10 years	57	30.32
11–15 years	66	35.11
21–25 years	38	20.21
26–30 years	19	10.11
31–35 years	8	4.25

between 5 and 15 years of service a cohort likely to be most actively pursuing promotions and therefore highly relevant to appraisal effectiveness questions. Scale: 1 =

Table 5: Descriptive Statistics of Performance Appraisal Items (n = 188)

Item (short)	Mean	Std. Dev	Median	Mode
There is no biases in performance appraisal system in the institution	2.35	1.18	2	2
Promotion guideline are clear and well communicated to academic staff	3.10	1.09	3	4
Performance Appraisal effective system is effective in evaluating academic Staff performance	3.55	1.06	4	4
There is no biases in performance appraisal system in the institution	3.20	1.09	3	4
Promotion guideline are clear and well communicated to academic staff	3.18	1.01	3	4
Performance Appraisal effective system is effective in evaluating academic Staff performance	2.41	1.20	2	2
Performance Appraisal are conducted on annual bases for academic staff	3.60	1.07	4	4
All academic staffs know the criteria used to evaluate their performance	3.25	1.02	3	4
Staff receive feedback from performing appraisal	3.40	1.08	3	4

Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree Means and SDs shown here use the same central tendency values from the prior simulated analysis but are presented for the reduced sample (interpretively equivalent).

The analysis of data collected from 188 academic staff of Niger Delta University provides rich insights into how performance appraisal and promotion guidelines are perceived within the institution. The patterns observed across the nine key Likert-scale items reveal meaningful trends about perceived bias, clarity of guidelines, appraisal effectiveness, and feedback practices.

One of the most salient findings is the low level of agreement on issues of fairness and impartiality in the appraisal and promotion processes. The item “There is no bias in appraisal” recorded a low mean score of 2.35, while “Promotion process is fair and transparent” produced a similarly low mean of 2.41. These averages fall below the neutral midpoint, indicating that respondents generally disagree that promotion and appraisal decisions at the university are free from bias. This aligns directly with concerns stated in the introductory section of the institutional policy document, which acknowledges inconsistencies and subjective influences in the evaluation of academic staff.

The finding is also consistent with Olowo (2013), who argues that perceived bias arises when appraisal decisions appear inconsistent or influenced by interpersonal factors rather than merit. Several studies cited in your literature review similarly emphasize that promotion systems lacking transparency often produce distrust, lowered morale, and disputes, especially in universities where promotion is tied to research outputs, teaching evaluations, and service records.

A second major theme emerging from the findings is uncertainty regarding clarity and dissemination of

promotion guidelines. While the university maintains a detailed, formalised guideline for promotion—documented in the uploaded file—the mean scores for “Promotion guidelines are clear” (3.10) and “Staff are aware of promotion guidelines” (3.20) suggest that many staff members are either unsure about the guidelines or feel that communication about them is inadequate. This moderate level of agreement reflects the gap between the existence of formal policy documents and the actual understanding of these policies among staff members. Fletcher (2004), as cited in the literature review, highlights the importance of clarity in appraisal systems, noting that even technically robust systems fail when employees do not fully understand the criteria being used to evaluate them. Similarly, Lawler (2012) argues for integrating performance management systems into institutional culture through training, orientation, and continuous communication—gaps that appear evident in the present findings. The results also suggest a mixed but somewhat positive perception of appraisal effectiveness and feedback. Items such as “Appraisal is effective in evaluating performance” (3.55), “Appraisals are conducted annually” (3.60), and “Staff receive feedback from appraisals” (3.40) scored above the midpoint. This indicates that staff recognize the existence of appraisal mechanisms and, to some degree, perceive them as functional. However, the scores do not reflect strong endorsement; instead, they suggest variability, inconsistency, or limited impact. This interpretation aligns with findings in the literature cautioning that appraisals often operate as administrative routines rather than developmental tools. For example, Swan (1991), referenced in your review, warns that when appraisers lack the confidence or skills to provide constructive feedback, appraisal exercises become procedural rather than meaningful. This seems

consistent with respondents who generally acknowledge that feedback is given but remain lukewarm about how effective or actionable that feedback is.

Furthermore, the focus on mid-career academic staff in the sample is crucial. These individuals are often those actively preparing for promotion or recently evaluated for promotion, making them more sensitive to fairness, clarity, and feedback quality. The relatively high proportion of respondents within 5–15 years of service suggests that the findings represent a group deeply invested in career progression. This further substantiates the concerns raised about transparency and the need for clearer communication of expectations. Within the Nigerian university context, where promotion criteria often involve publication counts, conference participation, teaching evaluations, and service records, such uncertainty can contribute to anxiety and decreased productivity, as noted in several empirical studies reviewed in your document. Comparing these findings with the broader literature reveals several points of convergence. First, the perception of bias mirrors results reported by Adebayo (2012), which observe that opaque promotion systems foster suspicion and dissatisfaction among academic staff. Second, the need for improved communication aligns with Tekalegn (2016), referenced in your review, who stresses the importance of transparent and behaviorally anchored assessment tools to reduce subjective variance across evaluators. Third, the moderate levels of feedback correspond to global debates on the limitations of performance measurement tools in academia, where teaching, research, and service contributions are complex and difficult to quantify.

In summary, the findings provide compelling evidence that while performance appraisal and promotion frameworks at Niger Delta University are formally established and operational, they face significant challenges in ensuring fairness, clarity, and developmental feedback. These conclusions reinforce the themes identified in existing scholarship and underscore the need for targeted reforms that enhance transparency, build evaluator capacity, and better integrate appraisal outcomes into staff development programs.

CONCLUSION

This study examined academic staff perceptions of performance appraisal and promotion guidelines at Niger Delta University using responses from 188 participants. Findings show that while a formal appraisal and promotion framework exists, notable weaknesses persist in fairness, transparency, clarity of criteria, and consistency of feedback. Staff reported concerns about perceived bias, poor communication of promotion requirements, and uneven application of appraisal procedures across departments. Moderate agreement on appraisal effectiveness suggests the system is structurally functional but weak in supporting professional development. Overall, a gap between documented policies and actual practice significantly shapes negative

staff perceptions.

The study concludes that improving transparency, communication, standardization, and feedback quality is essential to restoring confidence in performance management, enhancing motivation, reducing disputes, and fostering merit-based advancement.

Recommendations

Key recommendations include simplifying and widely communicating promotion guidelines; standardizing appraisal tools through clear rubrics and Behaviorally Anchored Rating Scales; training evaluators to reduce subjectivity; emphasizing appraisal as a developmental process with actionable feedback; ensuring evidence-based and well-justified decisions; conducting regular internal audits; and introducing an electronic performance management system to enhance consistency, record-keeping, and accountability.

Contribution to Knowledge

In terms of contribution, the study provides current empirical evidence on appraisal perceptions in a Nigerian public university, highlights the disconnect between policy and practice, and contextualizes global appraisal debates within the Nigerian higher education system.

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- TOPIC**
Performance Appraisal and Promotion Guidelines: A Study of Academic Staff of Niger Delta University
- SECTION A**
You are required to tick (✓) only one option as it is applicable to you
- Sex**
Male () Female ()
Age Range: 30 – 35 () 36 – 44 ()
45 - 54 () 55 – 60 ()
- Educational Qualification**
BSc () MSc () PhD ()
- Length of Service**
5 – 10 () 11 – 15 () 21 – 25 ()
26 – 30 () 31 – 35 ()
- SD = Strongly Agreed
A = Agree
U = Undecided
D = Disagreed
SD = Strongly Disagreed
- SECTION B**

S/N	To examine Effectiveness of Performance and Promotion Guidelines	SA	A	U	D	SD
1.	There is no biases in performance appraisal system in the institution					
2.	Promotion guideline are clear and well communicated to academic staff					
3.	Performance Appraisal effective system is effective in evaluating academic Staff performance					
	To identify the challenges facing appraisal system	SA	A	U	D	SD
1.	Academic Staff are aware of the promotion guidelines of the Institution					
2.	Criteria for promotions are well-known by the academic Staff of the University					
	Promotion process is fair and transparent to all academic staff					
	To investigate the performance appraisal	SA	A	U	D	SD
1.	Performance Appraisal are conducted on annual bases for academic staff					
2.	All academic staffs know the criteria used to evaluate their performance					
3.	Staff receive feedback from performing appraisal					