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Perception of Employee Development Programs among Non-Academic Employees in Selected State-owned Tertiary Institutions in South-East Nigeria

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Abstract

Employees remain the most valuable asset for organisational productivity and success. As such, serious minded organisations have recognised the need for improving the knowledge and skills of their employees through employee development programs. However, the extent to which employee development programs are taken seriously within public tertiary institutions in Nigeria remains questionable. This study was therefore positioned to fill this gap in empirical research by investigating employee's perception of employee development programs in public tertiary institutions in the Southeast Nigeria. Data for the study were collected from 205 non-academic employees of two selected State-owned tertiary institutions within the Southeast Nigeria, who participated in the study through a web-based questionnaire administration. Data collected through the Google Form web-based survey software package were transformed from the original Excel format to Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software package, which aided the processing of relevant data. Data processed through the SPSS software were thereafter analysed descriptively using frequency count and simple percentage and presented in tables and graphs. Findings of the study revealed that the employees of public tertiary institutions in the Southeast Nigeria expressed negative perception regarding the various aspects of employee development programs measured in terms of perceived frequency, availability, adequacy and quality of the programs. The study recommended the need for State-owned tertiary institutions in Nigeria and by extension all public tertiary institutions to realise the benefits of employee development programs and become serious with designing and implementing them at regularly or periodic intervals.

Keywords: Perception, Employee Development, Programs, Tertiary institutions

Introduction

Employees remain the most valuable asset for organisational productivity and success. Hence, the development needs of employees have been a major priority for serious organisations, particularly within many private corporate organisations. In this light, the concept of employee development program has gained attention in the contemporary industrial relations literature, with some scholars noting that when organizations contribute towards the employee development activities, the employees work hard and utilize their full skills and efforts to achieve the goals of the organizations (Hameed & Waheed, 2011). Other scholars have equally linked employee development to job satisfaction (Champathes, 2006; Chaudhary & Bhaskar, 2016; Osewe & Gindicha, 2021). These show that employee development programme is key to the professional

development of employees, which invariably results to overall job commitment and organisational efficiency.

Employee development programme has been conceived as a training program that helps employees within an organisation to improve their skills and abilities, with the ultimate aim of influencing organisational productivity. In fact, scholars like Mullins (2010) asserted that the underlying objective of employee development program is to improve the performance of the individual employee, thereby leading to improvement in the performance of the organization as a whole. Employee development program involves a range of activities including formal education, job experiences, professional relationships, and assessment of personality, skills and abilities that help employees grow professionally (Noe, Clarke & Klein, 2014). In specific terms, employee development programs may involve activities that expose the employees to improved knowledge and skills in their respective areas of profession such as workshops and seminars, on-the-job training, mentoring, task/job rotation, conferences, leadership/managerial training, among others (Adejare et al, 2020).

Employee development program is of essence in the contemporary work environment considering the dramatic changes that are constantly introduced within work organisations in line with global best practices, in terms of technology use, internet compliance, emphasis on professionalism and other trends within the contemporary time. Hence employee development programs ensure that employees keep themselves abreast with the latest trends and developments in labour market in order to have competitive advantage in the fierce competitive market.

However, despite the conceived importance of employee development programs to the productivity of employees, its practicality in most public institutions, particularly public tertiary institutions in Nigeria is questionable in the contemporary time. The fact that a number of scholar have documented unwholesome and incompetent work behaviours among employees in Nigerian tertiary institutions (Adejare, Olaore, Udofia, & Emola, 2020; Onyeizugbe, Ndubuisi-Okolo & Odi, 2021), is an indication that something is missing and such missing content could be that of employee development programs. In other words, there is a possibility that employee development programs may be deficient within the context of public tertiary institutions in Nigeria, which often results to low employees' performance. However, this view cannot be concluded in a hurry without being subjected to empirical test. Hence, in order to take a stand on this argument, this study considered employees' perception towards employee development programs in the public tertiary institutions in Nigeria as a viable approach to gaining a better understanding about this argument. Although a number of studies have examined the relationship between employee development programs and different aspects of organisational work behaviour (Mwangi, 2017; Saputri, Lorensa, Asriani & Za, 2020; Tjeng, Said & Wandary, 2016), not much has been studied in recent literature about employees' perception of the development programs within their organisations, particularly within the context of the State-owned tertiary institutions in Nigeria. Thus, this study intends to fill this gap in knowledge by investigating employees' perception regarding the employee development programs in the selected State-owned tertiary institutions.

METHODS

This study was conducted among non-academic employees of two selected State-owned universities in the Southeast Nigeria. This study adopted the descriptive cross-sectional survey research design. It is a research design that provides data for describing the status or characteristics of a phenomena or relationship among phenomena, at a specific point in time (Ihudiebube-Splendor & Chikeme, 2020). This research design was also considered appropriate for this study in due its flexibility in helping gather data at a specific point in time for a defined population. A sample of 205 respondents participated in the study through an online-survey approach. The online survey approach was adopted in this study in view of its flexibility, convenience, cost-effective, ease in reaching a large number of respondents, and easy analysis of data, among others. The online-survey approach involved the use of Google Form survey administration software package in designing questionnaire measuring “employees’ perception of development programs in their organisations”. Employees’ perception was considered relevant for this study considering the view that they are the direct beneficiaries of such programs and are in better position to express their experiences and feelings regarding the programs. The perception of the employees on development programs were measured on five dimensions of employee development programs viz: i) forms/types of programs are offered, ii) frequency – how often the employees receive such programs, iii) availability of key programs required by employees, iv) perceived quality of the programs, v) perceived adequacy of the programs in enhancing employees’ skills.

Considering that data were collected through online approach, participation was made voluntary. This means that the web-based questionnaire link was forwarded to different social media groups for the employees, with the help of the groups’ administrators who helped to explain the aim of the study and gave confidence to the respondents about the authenticity of the questionnaire link. At the beginning of the distribution period, a timeline of three weeks was set, after which any data entry was discarded. This implies that the respondents were given a window of three weeks to complete the questionnaire. As such, participation was made voluntary and only the data entries within the set timeline were considered valid for the study. At the end of the set timeline, only 205 data entries were obtained and used for data analysis. The data obtained were transformed from the excel spreadsheet to the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software package version 21, which was thereafter used in processing all the relevant statistical data. Analysis of data involved both descriptive and inferential analysis.

FINDINGS

Table 1: *Distribution of Respondents' Socio-Demographic Variables*

Socio-Demographic Variables	Frequency	Percent
Sex		
Male	100	48.8
Female	105	51.2
Total	205	100.0
Age Categories		
22 - 29 Years	19	9.3
30 - 39 Years	60	29.3
40 - 49 Years	83	40.5
50 - 59 Years	35	17.1
60 - 69 Years	8	3.9
Total	205	100.0
Marital Status		
Single	50	24.4
Married	136	66.3
Widowed	14	6.8
Divorced/Separated	5	2.4
Total	205	100.0
Official Rank		
Junior Staff	65	31.7
Intermediate	89	43.4
Senior	51	24.9
Total	205	100.0

Table 1 contains information on the analysis in relation to the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents. The information therein showed that slightly higher proportion (51.2%) of female employees participated in the survey compared to relatively lower proportion (48.8%) of male employees within the selected State-owned tertiary institutions. For the age distribution of the respondents, the largest proportion (40.5%) of the respondents aged between 40 – 49 years old, while the least proportion (3.9%) were those who aged between 60 – 69 years old. These findings imply that the majority of employees within the selected tertiary institutions were mid-adult individuals. This equally justifies why majority (66.3%) of them were married compare to relatively lower proportion (24.4%) of them who were single. With regards to the official rank of the employees, data analysis showed that the majority (43.4%) of them were at the intermediate

level. The junior staff comprised of 31.7% of the respondents, while 24.9% of them were senior employees.

Perception Employee Development Programs

The respondents were asked to indicate whether or not they have received any form of employee development program within the past five years from the period of this present study. Their responses were analysed in cross tabulation with two socio-demographic variables including official rank and gender. Result of the analysis was presented in figure 1.

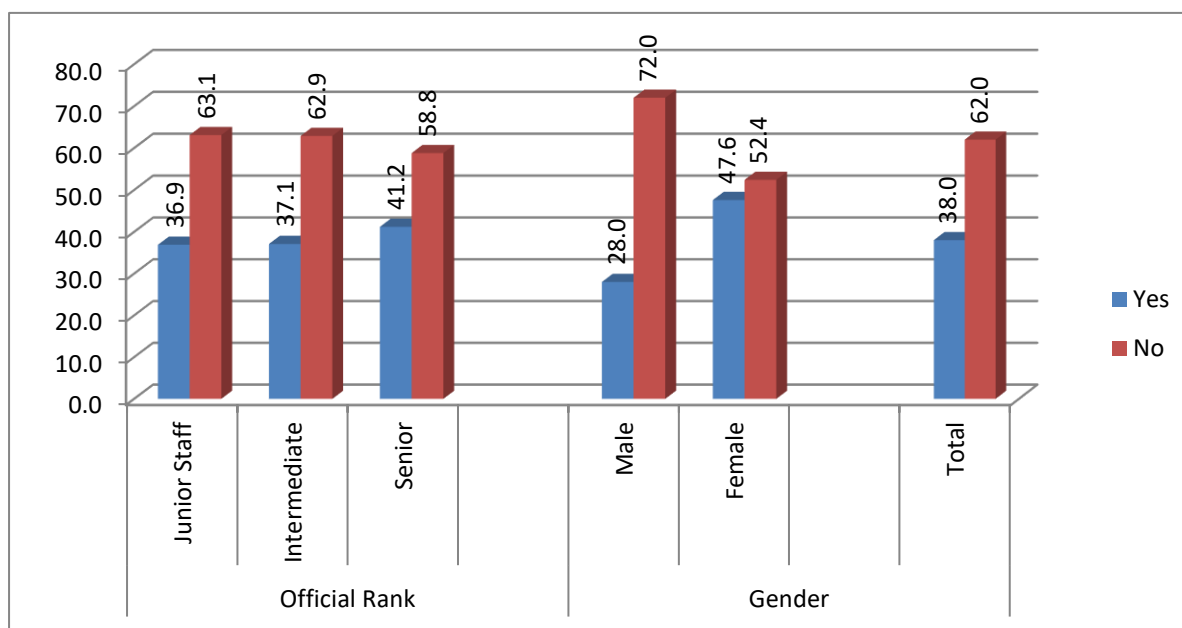


Figure 1. Distribution of Respondents according to Official rank and gender in relation to receipt of Development Programs

Judging from the series containing the analysis of total responses, a majority (62.0%) of the respondents indicated that they had not received any form of employee development program in the last five years prior to the period of this study. only about a quarter proportion (38.0%) of them indicated to have received such. Among the proportion of respondents who indicated to have received such programs, data analysis showed that senior employees (41.2%) were slightly more likely to receive employee development programs compared to the junior employees (36.9%) and those at the intermediate level (37.1%) respectively. This implies that the little opportunities available for employee development programs were more often offered to the senior employees compared to other employee levels. On the other hand, female employees (47.6%) were more likely than the male employees to receive the available employee development program within their organisations.

For the proportion of respondents who indicated to have received employee development programs, we tried to determine their perception about the frequency of the programs offered to them. Responses gathered in this regards were analysed and presented in figure 2.

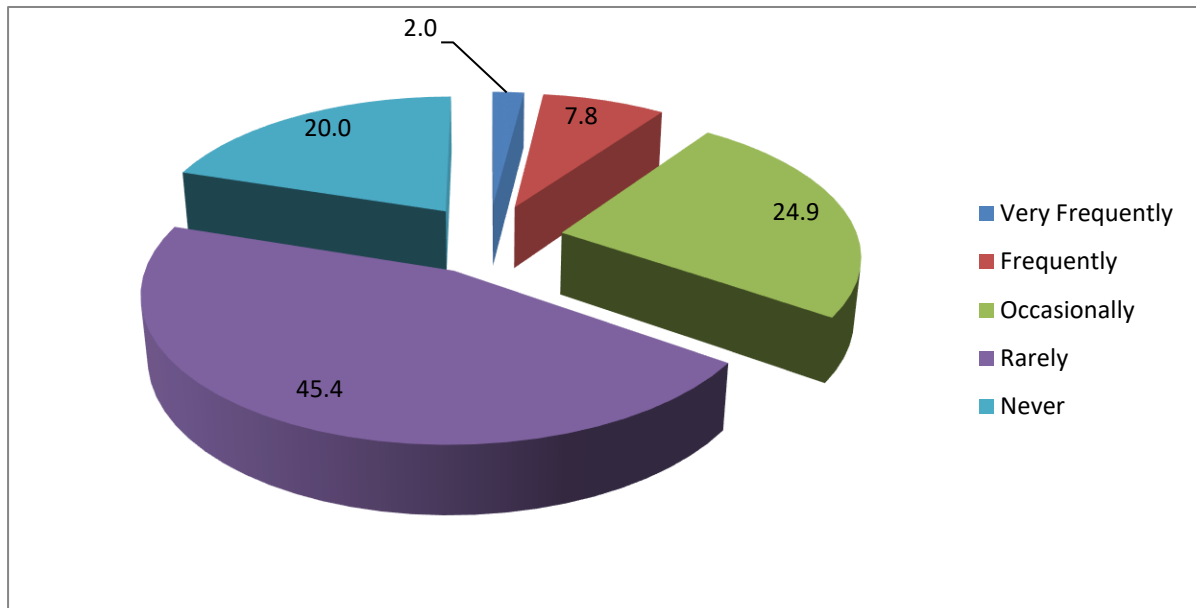


Figure 2. Respondents' Perception of how Frequent Development Programs are offered

In figure 1, the largest proportion (45.4%) of the respondents indicated that employee development programs are 'rarely' offered to employees within their departments/units. However, about a quarter proportions (24.9%) of them indicated that such programs are occasionally offered to them.

A multiple choice 'tick all that apply' question was directed to the respondents and obliged them to indicate the most commonly offered employed development program within their organisation. Their responses were subjected to the Multiple Response Set (MRS) analysis in SPSS as presented in table 2.

Table 2.

Summary of Respondents' Views on the Employee Development Programs mostly offered

Types of Employee Development Programs	Responses		Percent of Cases
	N	Percent	
Task/job rotation	108	9.7%	52.7%
Coaching	107	9.6%	52.2%
Mentoring	101	9.1%	49.3%
Workshops	111	10.0%	54.1%
Conferences	116	10.4%	56.6%
On-the-job training	109	9.8%	53.2%
Career planning	114	10.3%	55.6%
Seminars	119	10.7%	58.0%
Leadership Training	127	11.4%	62.0%
Others	100	9.0%	48.8%
Total	1112	100.0%	542.4%

a. Dichotomy group tabulated at value 1.

Result of the analysis as presented in table 2 showed that the most occurring frequencies in the multiple choice analysis as indicated by relatively the majority of the respondents included: leadership training (11.4%), seminars (10.7%), conferences (10.4%), career planning (10.3%) and workshops (10.0%), among other options which gained lower responses as indicated in table 2.

Table 3.

Respondents' Perceptions Regarding the Adequacy of the Employee Development Programs Offered in their Organisations

Responses	Frequency	Percent
Completely Inadequate	69	33.7
Inadequate	63	30.7
Neutral	30	14.6
Fairly Adequate	23	11.2
Very Adequate	20	9.8
Total	205	100.0

As contained in table 3, the highest proportion (33.7%) of the respondents perceived the employee development programs offered to employees in their organisations as completely inadequate. This was equally followed by 30.7% of them who went for the option 'inadequate'. This finding implies that the respondents had negative perception about the adequacy of the employee development programs offered in the State-owned tertiary institutions in Nigeria, particularly within the two selected tertiary institutions.

Table 4.

Respondents' Perception regarding the Quality of Employee Development Programs Offered

Responses	Frequency	Percent
Very Poor	65	31.7
Below Average	55	26.8
Average	49	23.9
Above Average	25	12.2
Excellent	11	5.4
Total	205	100.0

Data analysed in table 4 showed that the highest proportion (31.7%) of the respondents perceived the quality of employee development programs offered in their organisations as very poor. This was followed by 26.8% of them who equally rated it as below average. Only 23.9% of them perceived it as being at the average quality, a very lower proportion (5.4%) of them rated it as excellent.

Table 5.

Covariates of overall Perception towards Employee Development Programs

Covariates	Chi-Square	Sig.	Decision
Official Rank	16.414 ^a	.037	Significant
Sex	4.093 ^a	.394	Not Significant
Marital Status	13.744 ^a	.317	Not Significant
Age	12.553 ^a	.705	Not Significant

Further analysis was conducted to test the relationship between selected covariates including official rank, sex, marital status and age. As observed in table 5, except for official rank, no statistically significant relationship was found between the other covariates (sex, marital status and age) and overall perception regarding employee development programs. This implies that only official rank significantly influences respondents' perception of employee development programs in the selected tertiary institutions.

Conclusion/Recommendations

The aim of this study was to investigate employees' perception of employee development programs within the State-owned tertiary institutions within the Southeast Nigeria. This study was premised on the view that employee development program is a major catalyst towards the development of employees' skills and capacities, as well as the overall productivity of public institutions in Nigeria. However, the practicality of employee development programs remains probable with various public tertiary institutions particularly within the Southeast Nigeria. This present study has actually demonstrated from the perceptions of the employees', that a huge gap exist in terms of implementation of employee development programs within the selected State-owned tertiary institutions, and by extension, within public tertiary institutions in the Southeast zone of Nigeria. It is worthy of note that the growth and efficiency of the public institutions in

Nigeria could be better enhanced through the development of their employees capacities. A situation where the employees are not adequately equipped with the knowledge and skills resources they require to perform their jobs effectively would only attract inefficiency and low performance, which are very dangerous for the growth of the public institutions in Nigeria. Hence, in order to ensure that employees are adequately equipped, the following are recommended:

1. The management of State-owned tertiary institutions in Nigeria and by extension all public tertiary institutions must realise the benefits of employee development programs and become serious with designing and implementing them at regularly or periodic intervals.
2. Employee development programs need to be designed based on employees' need and not as a way of fulfilling all righteousness or an avenue to amass wealth from the institutional treasury. This would ensure that the programs have relevance on the employees needs in terms of required knowledge and skills.
3. There is need for the introduction of policies regarding the number of employee development programs organised by departments as a yardstick or criterion for accreditation exercises for the various departments within public owned tertiary institutions in Nigeria. This would stimulate the consciousness of the administrators to ensure that their employees are regularly subjected to development programs.

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