

Influence of Perceived Organizational Politics in Performance Appraisal Process on Lecturers' Job Performance at Public Universities in Kenya: A Case of the University of Nairobi

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Abstract

Institutions of higher learning across the globe are progressively upholding high levels of academic staff performance by conducting performance appraisals. This is to maintain good quality educational outcomes and to improve the performance of both the academic staff and the institution. The aim of this study was to investigate the influence of perceived organizational politics in performance appraisal process on lecturers' job performance at public universities in Kenya, a case of the University of Nairobi. Three objectives served as the foundation for the study: to determine the impact of lecturers' perceptions of performance appraisal feedback, the utility of the PA findings, and weight distribution on performance. Purposive and stratified proportionate sampling and simple random sampling techniques were used to sample 11 deans of faculties, 19 chairs of the departments and 100 lecturers. Interview guide, open and closed-ended questionnaires and document analysis were the main instruments for data collection. The data was analyzed using both qualitative and quantitative techniques. The result of the study revealed that provision of performance appraisal feedback was selective and inconsistent. It was also found that the system lacked utilization of performance appraisal results and that the system favored performance in research and publications activities. As a result lecturers were not willing to take extra workload, and guide students promptly in their academic works. The study concluded that performance appraisal process was not fair thus it had negative influence on lecturers' job performance in public universities. The study recommend that there is need to revise the performance appraisal system in public universities to factor in best practices that would promote fairness in order to realize effective lecturers' job performance.

Keywords: Performances Appraisal Process, Organizational Politics, Lecturers' Job Performance

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1. INTRODUCTION

Employee's performance appraisal is one of the considerable activities of every organization because the success or failure of any organization depends, to a largely extend, on employees' performance. It is the formal processes and most effective method of analyzing individual performance with the aim of achieving institutional performance target (Nasreen and Naz, 2019). Performance appraisal essentially serves as the cornerstone of a system of performance management in an organization.

Institutions of higher learning, like many organizations, utilize performance appraisal process using predetermined job-related performance standards to evaluate their staff. The lecturers' job performance is likely to be affected by the results of this exercise owing to the fact that institutions of higher learning especially universities are knowledge based that specifically depend on the rich knowledge, expertise and commitment of its academic staff. This is because institutions of higher learning are challenged by the requirement to continuously deliver the highest quality in academic performance in their faculties and PA is used in ensuring the faculty performances always meet the required standards (Dasanyaka, Abeykoon, Ranaweera, and Koswatte, 2021).

However, the importance of performance appraisal as a managerial decision tool is questionable as to whether it serves the intended purpose. Kenya's public universities have come under criticism for churning out graduates that lack the necessary skills (World Bank, 2016, Lelei and Korir, 2017). Besides, some gaps in institutions of higher learning regarding the concept of performance appraisal has spawned some arguments. Issues such as self-interest, politics as well as institutional conflicts seem to affect the fair conduct and effectiveness of performance appraisal systems. It is argued that if the systems that are used throughout the conduct of appraisal are not fair and efficient, it becomes much of a trouble. The outcome of such assessments thereof are likely to affect how the appraised perceive them hence to shape the culture as well as the quality of academic work and output in the institutions (Devis and Mensah, 2020).

Organizational politics is not a new phenomenon in the institutions of higher learning. It refers to deliberate non-authorized practices and activities, intended to secure and upgrade personal gain at expense of institutional achievement. Researchers maintain that organizational politics and performance appraisal are closely related

since employees' performance is both qualitative as well as subjective in nature and is prone to politics (Sajid, Naveed, Khan and Khan, 2019).

Although there isn't conclusive proof that perceptions of politics surrounding performance appraisal have a detrimental impact on work performance, it is evident that organizational politics have a negative influence on employees' behavior and attitude (Naeem, Jamal, and Riaz, 2017). Organizational politics is likely to flourish in an institution when there is perceived uncertainty, ambiguity and favoritism in the performance appraisal process. It is argued that, if the structures that are used throughout the conduct of performance appraisal process are not fair, accurate and efficient, the appraisal outcomes will form the basis of political discussions among employees (Kumar et al, 2018). Subsequently, perception of injustice in the performance appraisal system has been linked to poor employee performance, according to studies (Umar, Amir, Javaid, and Luqman, 2016).

The organizational justice theory of Greenberg (1986) served as the foundation for this study. According to this theory, individuals are interested in three different sorts of justice: procedural, distributive, and interactional justices. The fairness of the procedures used to assess employees' performance is referred to as procedural justice in the context of performance appraisals (Mollel, 2017); that is the fairness regarding the methods and processes used during the evaluation process sessions and the standards implemented by the institutions that produce results (Kimanje, Onen and Bananuka, 2018).

The procedural justice domain in the performance appraisal context denotes the fairness of the processes used to evaluate employees' performance (Mollel 2017). Notably, when the appraisal is conducted improperly, it may not be advantageous for both the organization and the employees. For example, issues to do with inconsistent and selective feedback, improper use of performance evaluation results, and favoritism in the weighting of performance standards may limit the perception of justice and create organizational politics which is likely to have a negative impact on the lecturers' performance. The perception of perception of unfairness in performance appraisal procedure according to Kampkötter (2017) will not only pose a problem in management and work output but also depict the existence of organizational politics in the institution.

Perception of unfairness in weight distribution particularly in lecturers' areas of performance, for instance, is likely to limit the effectiveness of performance appraisal in enhancing employee' performance. Despite the widespread perception that research activities are more heavily weighted than other factors in the evaluation of lecturers' job performance in many higher education institutions around the world (Cadez, Dimovski, and Groff, 2017; Bogt and Scapens, 2012), this practice appears to favor a select group of lecturers whose primary role in the faculty or institution is research. As a result, this could compromise the effectiveness of other tasks including teaching, supervising student projects, and performing community service.

It is beyond dispute that lecturers play a significant role in providing high-quality instruction and training. Higher education institutions all across the world need highly qualified, educated, and competent human resources who can comprehend life's issues and offer workable solutions. By doing this, lecturers in these institutions are expected to play a crucial part in completing their mandate (teaching/training, conducting research, and performing community service) in order to produce highly qualified graduates for the nation who can play a significant role in its development. However, studies conducted recently have revealed that institutions and organizations that implemented performance appraisals with the goal of evaluating employees' performance revealed a struggle with concerns of ineptness of the process yet less has been done to uncover the issues faced.

A study done by Mbunde (2016) on employees' perception of staff appraisal at the University of Nairobi, for instance, established that the purpose of performance appraisal process at the University was not clearly articulated by the management and as a result, the system was ineffective and negatively perceived by the employees. Moreover, stakeholders have untiringly argued, that Kenyan universities are producing graduates who are ill-equipped for the ever-changing market (Kara, Tanui and Kalai, 2020). This to some extent has made most employers incur unpredicted and unnecessary expenses reequipping the graduates (Kagondou and Marwa, 2017; and Kara, Tanui and Kalai 2020). This study is very important since it may provide better comprehension on how the academic staff view performance appraisal process. As a practical framework, it may also promote perceptions on performance assessment and how it impacts job performance.

1.1 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The establishment of Performance Appraisal System (ROK, 2008) and the Commission for University Education (ROK, 2012) were established with the intention of ensuring the university's excellent teaching/training, research, and community services. Despite the intervention procedures put in place to enhance the standard of instruction at Kenya's public universities, some lecturers continue to perform below expectations. It appears that performance appraisal as a management procedure is not yielding the desired outcomes, especially at public universities. Thus exercise is likened to a normal process rather than as a tool that evaluates individual performance and as a guide to institutional decision making for better performance.

In consideration of this, the study on the influence of perceived organizational politic in performance

appraisal process on performance of the academic staff at public universities was undertaken as there was no prior study done on the issue at the University of Nairobi. This study focused on the public universities in Kenya. It was assumed that the identified institution is a good example of representing the usual practices within the higher educations. Therefore, this study is expected to fill the existing gaps in the literature particularly relating to the perceptions of organizational politics, performance appraisal process and lecturers job performance.

1.1.2 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The main purpose of this study was to investigate the influence of perceived organizational politics in performance appraisal process on lecturers' job performance in public universities in Kenya: a case of the University of Nairobi.

1.1.3 OBJECTIVES

The following objectives guided the study:

- i. To establish the influence of perceived organizational politics in PA feedback on lecturers' job performance
- ii. To determine the influence of perceived organizational politics in PA utility of results on lecturers' job performance.
- iii. To assess the influence of perceived organizational politics in PA weight distribution on lecturers' job performance

1.1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study was guided by the following research questions

H₀ There is no significant relationship between the performance appraisal process and lecturers' job performance.

1. How does perception of organizational politics in PA feedback influence lecturers' job performance?
2. How does perception of organizational politics in PA utilization of results influence lecturers' job performance?
3. How does perception of organizational politics in PA weight distribution influence lecturers' job performance?

1.1.5 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study benefited from both phenomenological design and descriptive design. The study was meant to investigate human behavior as a product of how people perceive the situations and also to allow the researchers gather information from respondents in their natural environment. The study targeted the academic staff drawn from all the eleven faculties of the University of Nairobi. Purposive, stratified proportionate sampling technique and simple random techniques were used to sample 11 deans of faculties, 19 chairs of departments 100 lecturers respectively and 100 post graduate students. The average response rate of the study was above 70 percent comprising of 6 deans of faculties, 15 chairs of the departments 70 lecturers and 91 post graduate students.

The research instruments used were: questionnaires, interview guide, focus group discussion and document analysis. The questionnaire was used to gather information from chairs of departments and lecturers who were the majority in their category while the interview guide was used to get information from the deans of the faculties. The validation of the study instruments was done by pre-testing the questionnaires in one department and discussing the questionnaire items with various relevant research experts. Based on the feedback from the pilot test, the questionnaire was modified and a final one developed. On the other hand, Cronbach alpha was used to determine the reliability of the instrument. The value of Cronbach alpha was above 0.812 for all items in lecturers' questionnaire and 0.845 in questionnaire items for the chairs of departments' questionnaire. According to Bryman and Bell (2013) a Cronbach's alpha of 0.7 is an acceptable reliability.

Both descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze the data that had been gathered. The quantitative data items from the structured on Likert-scale were converted into percentages, figures, tables, and findings using the computer program SPSS Version 25. The open ended questionnaire responses, interviews, focus groups, and other qualitative data from the narratives were categorized into themes in accordance with the research questions.

1.1.6 FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The researchers sought to establish whether lecturers routinely received feedback after their appraisal exercise. This was to obtain information on whether there were complaints based on performance appraisal assessment results that could hinder effective performance of the academic staff in the institution. The statement, "All lecturers in this department routinely receive feedback after appraisal" was then scored as reported in Table 1.

TABLE 1. RESPONSE ON PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL FEEDBACK

	Lecturers		Chairs of departments	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
SA	11	15.7	1	6.7
A	15	21.4	4	26.7
UD	5	7.1	1	6.7
D	29	41.4	7	46.6
SD	10	14.2	2	13.3
Total	70	100	15	100

The findings in Table 1 showed that the institutions performance rating method lacked feedback. The majority of the department chairs (60%) and lecturers (over 55 percent) who either disapproved or strongly disagreed with the statement attested to this. The majority of deans of faculties (more than 66 percent) confirmed this finding by revealing that the academic staff in various departments received uneven performance appraisal reports. According to one of the deans of the faculties:

“Some department do give appraisal feedback to their academic staff especially to the underperformers in order to enhance their performance.”

Another dean commented:

“Performance appraisal feedback in most cases is only administered when there is a general outcry of poor performance either in the department or in the institutional level.”

Based on this finding, it can be argued that performance appraisal feedback is selectively provided, if any, to the lecturers. This implies that the possible gaps identified by the academic staff in the performance appraisal process were not addressed adequately depriving the lecturers the opportunity to strategize on areas of improvement both in their performance and on the system used. Arguably, there could be unfair judgment for those left out of the process.

An attempt was made to assess the utility of the performance appraisal results in the institution. This was to determine whether the decisions reached based on lecturers’ performance appraisal results were fair. The negative statement, “So far there isn’t any tangible utilization of performance appraisal results in this department,” was given to the respondents to score and the results are presented in Table 2.

TABLE 2. RESPONSE ON PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL UTILITY

	Lecturers		Chairs of departments	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
SA	18	25.7	2	13.3
A	24	34.3	9	60
UD	4	5.7	0	0
D	14	20	3	20
SD	10	14.2	1	6.6
Total	70	100	15	100

The majority of both the chairs of departments (over 73%) and lecturers (60 percent) either agreed or strongly agreed that there was no utilization of the performance appraisal results. This finding was confirmed by the majority (over 83%) of the deans of faculties’ interviewed that utilization of performance appraisal results in the institution was minimal. One of the deans of faculties commented:

“In most cases performance appraisal results are left for administrative purpose since it is rarely pegged to promotion.”

Another dean commented:

“So far there is no award given to best performers based on performance appraisal results. However, the inadequate performers are reprimanded.”

On the basis of this finding, it can be argued that the academic staff are more likely to perceive the performance appraisal process as unfair because of selective utilization of results. This is likely to affect performance of the academic staff. This finding is comparable to that of Nyaoga, Kipchumba, and Magut (2010), who found that the performance appraisal process used in Kenyan private universities was ineffective because it was only used for formalities and did not assess lecturers' performance.

Further, the researchers sought to establish whether there was fair distribution of weight in performance standards. This was aimed at establishing whether the lecturers’ areas of performance were fairly assessed. The statement, “Weight distribution in performance appraisal tool favors performance in research and related activities than other performance” was given to the academic staff who scored as presented in Table 3.

TABLE 3. RESPONSE ON FAIR PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL WEIGHT DISTRIBUTION

	Lecturers		Chairs of departments	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
SA	20	28.6	2	13.3
A	30	42.9	8	53.3
UD	2	2.9	1	6.6
D	15	21.4	3	20
SD	3	4.3	1	6.6
Total	70	100	15	100

The results suggest that the majority of the lecturers (over 70 percent) and the majority of the department chairs (approximately 67 percent) either agreed or strongly agreed to the assertion that performance in research and related activities has greater weight than other areas in the performance evaluation. This finding was confirmed by data from the majority of deans of faculties (more than 60 percent). One of them had this to say:

“Research activities generally is believed to be quite involving and one of the main activities of an academician is to carry out quality research for the institution. Therefore every academic staff is aware of the ground rules governing performance in this institution.”

Another dean commented:

“Apart from teaching every lecturer is required to carry out research and publish articles, thus individuals strive to fulfil their mandate because it is awarded more points than other performance.”

Based on these responses it can be argued that the academic staff are likely to concentrate on research and publication more at the expense of teaching, guiding students in projects and thesis and taking up the other duties and responsibilities assigned to them.

Hypothesis was tested in order to determine whether there was a statistical relationship between the perceived organizational politics in performance appraisal process and lecturers’ job performance. Chi Square (χ^2) test was used to test the hypothesis using the information gathered from both chairs of departments and lecturers. The findings are presented separately in Tables 4 and 5.

TABLE 4. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PERCEIVED POLITICS IN PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL AND LECTURERS’ JOB PERFORMANCE (CHAIRS OF THE DEPARTMENTS)

Chi-Square Tests			
	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	29.398 ^a	20	.0543
Likelihood Ratio	27.980	20	.110
Linear-by-Linear Association	.337	1	.562
N of Valid Cases	15		

a. 29 cells (87.9%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .13.

The findings in Table 4 shows that the Pearson Chi Square (Pearson Value (χ_2) 29.398,df = 28) has a p-value of 0.543 which is greater than the level of significance 0.05 (P-value 0.080>0.05 level of significance). Hence the hypothesis is rejected.

TABLE 5 RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PERCEIVED POLITICS IN PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL AND LECTURERS’ JOB PERFORMANCE (LECTURERS’ RESPONSE)

Chi-Square Tests			
	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	25.719 ^a	28	.80
Likelihood Ratio	30.369	28	.346
Linear-by-Linear Association	.231	1	.630
N of Valid Cases	70		

a. 45 cells (100.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .23.

Table 5 shows that the Pearson Chi Square (Pearson Value (χ_2)25.719,df = 28) has a p-value of 0.80 which is greater than the level of significance 0.05 (P-value 0.080>0.05 level of significance). The hypothesis is rejected.

The p-value of 0.543 and p-value of 0.80 shows that there is significant relationship between perceived organizational politics in performance appraisal process and lectures’ job performance. This study therefore rejects the null hypothesis (performance appraisal process has no significant influence on lecturers’ job

performance). Hence, perceived organizational politics in performance appraisal process is significantly related to lecturers' job performance.

Further, the students were asked to report on how the lectures performed their duties in teaching and guiding them in the projects and thesis developments. It was reported that some lecturers often miss classes without makeup lessons, some delay in giving feedback on students' work and that some had no time for consultation with the students. As a result some units were taught hurriedly and stagnation in thesis writing. One of the students (masters) had this to say:

"I have challenges in research work now because I was not taught well, in reality the notes I have is just one page..."

Yet another student commented (masters) Commented:

"It has taken six months for my supervisor to give feedback on my project proposal...I am not sure whether this is due to workload or negligence..."

Based on these findings, it can be argued that students' complains over lecturers often miss classes without explanations or make up classes and delay in giving feedback and prompt response during project and thesis development, is an indication of low morale that may emanate from perceived politics in the institution especially from the performance appraisal process.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings this concluded that performance appraisal process was not fare thus it had negative influence on lecturers' job performance in public universities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommend that there is need to revise the performance appraisal system in public universities to factor in best practices that would promote fairness in order to realize effective lecturers' job performance. It also recommends a similar study to be carried out in private universities with different management systems to compare the findings since this study focused on public universities.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

There is no any conflict of interest declared.

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