Assessing the Influence of Performance Appraisal Systems on Employee Performance in Selected Hotels in Enugu State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study examined the effect of performance appraisal systems on employee performance in selected hotels in Enugu State, Nigeria. Data were collected from 136 respondents across five prominent hotels using a structured questionnaire. The Pearson product-moment correlation was employed for hypothesis testing. The findings revealed that performance appraisal feedback has a strong positive relationship with employee productivity, while appraisal fairness significantly influences customer satisfaction. In addition, goal-setting was found to correlate positively with service quality. The study concludes that effective and transparent performance appraisal systems are essential for improving employee productivity, service quality, and customer satisfaction in the hospitality sector.

Keywords: *Performance Appraisal Systems, Employee Performance, Hotels Industry, Nigeria*

Introduction

The concept of performance appraisal has undergone significant transformation in recent years, evolving into a central component of contemporary human resource management. Initially developed for administrative purposes, modern performance appraisal systems have become strategic tools for enhancing employee development and organizational performance. Shawn (2024) emphasizes that effective appraisal systems play a crucial role in improving employee engagement, particularly when they incorporate quality feedback, transparency, and alignment with organizational objectives. In the hospitality industry, where service quality directly influences customer satisfaction, robust performance appraisal systems are especially vital. Kiran and Ijaz (2024) observe that tailored appraisal approaches in hotels can significantly enhance employee motivation and service quality. Furthermore, the integration of human resource analytics into appraisal processes helps to minimize subjectivity and improve fairness and accuracy in performance ratings, thereby strengthening employees' capacity for performance improvement (Sharma & Sharma, 2017). These developments highlight the importance of performance appraisal systems in fostering a culture of excellence and continuous improvement. Performance appraisal refers to the formal process through which organizations evaluate employees' performance against established standards and targets. It serves as a fundamental human resource management tool by providing constructive feedback, guiding promotion, compensation, and training decisions, and aligning individual goals with organizational

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objectives (Niikiis, 2023). In the hospitality industry, where service quality is closely linked to customer satisfaction and repeat patronage, effective appraisal systems play a critical role in monitoring, directing, and enhancing employee productivity across departments such as front office, housekeeping, food and beverage, and maintenance (FasterCapital, 2023). As a labour-intensive and service-oriented sector, hospitality relies heavily on employee performance, which directly shapes customer experience. When properly implemented, performance appraisals reinforce positive behaviour, address performance deficiencies, and enhance employee motivation and morale (StudySmarter, 2023).

Empirical studies consistently demonstrate a positive relationship between performance appraisal systems and employee performance. Scholars note that appraisals serve both developmental and administrative functions by identifying performance gaps, recommending development strategies, and recognizing high performers for reward purposes. Onyeneho and Okechukwu (2023), in their study of Nigeria's hospitality industry, reported a strong positive relationship between appraisal practices and employee performance. They identified timely feedback, fair evaluation criteria, and employee recognition as key drivers of motivation and commitment. Similarly, Appelbaum et al. (2011) argue that appraisal systems significantly influence job satisfaction, organizational citizenship behaviour, and turnover intentions when employees perceive them as fair, transparent, and growth-oriented.

Within the Nigerian context, performance appraisal practices have been extensively examined in both public and private organizations, although findings often vary. Akinwumi (2024) investigated appraisal systems at Kwara State University and found that employee participation, continuous feedback, and clearly defined performance metrics improved productivity and reduced absenteeism and disengagement. In the public sector, studies conducted in Enugu State ministries (Eze & Ishiwe, 2023; Egwuagu & Chikeleze, 2023) revealed that effective appraisal systems enhanced staff morale, innovation, and time management. However, these studies also identified challenges such as favoritism, inadequate training of appraisers, and weak follow-up development plans, which undermined the effectiveness of appraisal processes.

The hotel sub-sector constitutes a major contributor to Nigeria's socio-economic development through employment generation, revenue creation, tourism promotion, and infrastructure development. In Enugu State, which serves as a gateway to South-Eastern Nigeria, the hotel industry has experienced notable growth driven by urbanization, expansion of educational institutions, political activities, cultural tourism, and increased business and leisure travel. Despite periodic security challenges, the sector continues to expand, resulting in intensified competition among hotels. Consequently, customer service has emerged as a critical competitive advantage, compelling hotels to adopt strategic human resource practices aimed at enhancing service delivery and employee performance. Among these practices, performance appraisal systems occupy a central position (Amalu & Ajake, 2020).

Despite their acknowledged importance, limited scholarly attention has been devoted to examining the application and effectiveness of performance appraisal systems in hotels in Enugu State. This represents a significant research gap, considering the distinctive characteristics of the hotel industry, including irregular working hours, high employee turnover, diverse educational backgrounds, and the intangible nature of service quality. Operating within a highly dynamic environment, hotel employees must continuously adapt to changing customer expectations, managerial demands, and competitive pressures. Consequently, appraisal systems must be flexible, continuous, and responsive to real-time organizational needs. Inadequate feedback and

guidance can lead to employee demotivation, poor service delivery, customer dissatisfaction, and reduced profitability.

Further complexity arises from the increasing demand for holistic and employee-centered evaluation models that extend beyond traditional performance measures. Contemporary human resource literature advocates appraisal systems that incorporate dimensions such as emotional intelligence, teamwork, communication skills, and mental well-being. The conventional top-down appraisal approach, in which supervisors solely evaluate subordinates, is increasingly viewed as limited in scope. As a result, participatory approaches such as 360-degree feedback, self-assessment, and peer evaluation are gaining prominence, particularly in team-based environments like hotels.

Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic significantly altered hotel operations in Nigeria. Movement restrictions, reduced occupancy levels, and heightened health and safety requirements introduced new challenges to employee evaluation. Many hotels adopted remote training, digital check-in systems, and skeletal workforce models, necessitating the restructuring of appraisal frameworks to suit post-pandemic realities. Attributes such as flexibility, adaptability, and compliance with safety protocols have become essential performance indicators. Achara et al. (2024), in their post-pandemic study of banks in Southeastern Nigeria, advocated for more responsive and agile appraisal models that balance organizational objectives with employee well-being. Given the service-oriented nature of both sectors, these findings are relevant to the hospitality industry.

Against this backdrop, this study seeks to critically examine the relationship between performance appraisal systems and employee performance in selected hotels in Enugu State. Specifically, it aims to assess the extent to which appraisal practices influence employee productivity, service quality, and customer satisfaction, while identifying existing weaknesses and proposing practical improvement strategies. By addressing these issues, the study intends to contribute to the growing body of knowledge on human resource management in the hospitality sector and provide actionable insights for hotel managers to enhance employee engagement, reduce turnover, and improve overall organizational performance.

Literature Review

Theoretical Framework

Goal-Setting Theory

The Goal-Setting Theory, developed by Edwin Locke and Gary Latham in 1990, posits that difficult, specific, and quantifiable goals will enhance the performance and motivation of employees. The theory holds that realistic performance expectations, regular feedback, and the involvement of employees in goal-setting lead to higher task involvement and output (Locke & Latham, 1990). Under performance appraisal, this theory emphasizes that when employees are aware of the appraisal criteria and are involved in goal-setting, they are more productive and committed. This study applies the Goal-Setting Theory to explain how effective appraisal systems with employee participation in goal setting and transparent performance measures can enhance employee productivity and service delivery. Based on the contention by Latham (2016), goal clarity and feedback mechanisms in appraisal systems are motivational factors that maximize workplace efficiency.

Expectancy Theory

Expectancy Theory, formulated by Victor Vroom in 1964, explains motivation as a function of three variables: expectancy (perception that effort will lead to performance), instrumentality (perception that performance will lead to rewards), and valence (desirability of the reward for the individual). The theory predicts that employees will be better motivated when they believe that

their performance will be fairly evaluated and will lead to intended outcomes (Vroom, 1964). Expectancy Theory constitutes the foundation of this study in the role of performance appraisal systems to enhance employee performance. The theory argues that employees, if provided with timely feedback, fair, and connected with preferable rewards (i.e., promotion, praise, or development possibilities), are likely to be more willing to work harder. In so doing, the theory enhances the correlation of effective appraisal feedback systems and outcomes such as employee productivity and service quality (Purvis et al., 2016).

Relationship between Performance Appraisal Feedback and Employee productivity

Performance appraisal feedback is a critical component of the performance management cycle and influences employee productivity directly. Feedback is the information provided to employees regarding their performance, generally in appraisal interviews, with the intent of reinforcing strengths, eliminating weaknesses, and guiding future performance. When delivered effectively, feedback is a motivational aid and a teaching manual that enhances the effectiveness and productivity of employees. According to Aguinis (2019), feedback will be most effective when it is developmental, timely, and specific. Effective positive feedback tells employees what is required of them, where they currently stand relative to those requirements, and what they must do to fill performance gaps. This openness is likely to be converted into higher concentration and productivity since employees are better placed to align their behavior with organizational goals. The effectiveness of feedback on productivity also depends on the believability of the appraiser and the openness of the communication process (Imhanrenialena et al., 2022; Imhanrenialena et al., 2023). Studies by Al-Jaradat et al. (2021) indicated that employees who consider their appraisal feedback to be sincere and equitable are likely to be motivated towards work and exhibit improved output. When employees believe that their work is appreciated and their issues are listened to, it creates a feeling of belonging and commitment, which are essential to productivity. Aside from that, feedback in performance appraisal is accountable for continuous improvement in skills and ongoing learning. Employees' worker feedback assists in facilitating opportunities for personal reflection, personal development targets establishment, and eliciting corresponding training opportunities. Armstrong and Taylor (2020), as noted by them, reinforce that feedback tools in a culture of learning serve to highly advance workforce productivity through ensuring that improvement in employees goes in tandem with changing organizational requirements.

Feedback also corrects performance deviations at an early point before they turn into systemic inefficiencies. This plays a preventive role to allow organizations to achieve high levels of performance while avoiding expensive errors and time wastage. Feedback in high-performing organizations is an ongoing process and not limited to end-of-year reviews and is evidence-based on performance measures (Lira et al., 2020). In essence, in both practice and theory, performance appraisal feedback builds its link to employee productivity. Higher reported employee productivity, as well as employee satisfaction and goal alignment, is indicated among organizations which are investing in sound feedback practices.

Relationship between Appraisal Fairness and Transparency and Customer satisfaction

The fairness and transparency of performance appraisal systems strongly impact not only employees' morale and motivation but also have an effect on outside stakeholders, above all, customers. If employees believe the process of appraising their performance to be objective, transparent, and fair, they increase trust in the management, build accountability, and generate customer-oriented behavior to raise the satisfaction level of the customers.

Fairness in appraisal of performance typically encompasses three dimensions: distributive fairness (perceived fairness of outcome), procedural fairness (fairness in the procedure used to

determine outcomes), and interactional fairness (respectful and informative communication during appraisal). According to Erdogan (2020), perceived fairness in these dimensions leads to higher job satisfaction, higher organizational commitment, and more effective service behavior, all of which are critical drivers of customer satisfaction.

Transparency in the appraisal process is also crucial. It includes transparent communication of performance expectations, open feedback channels, and consistency in applying the criteria for evaluation. Employees who understand how and why they are being measured are more likely to accept appraisal outcomes and act favorably on criticism. A study by Gupta and Kumar (2016) found that transparent appraisal practices increase employees' willingness to go the extra mile in service delivery, thereby having a positive impact on the customer experience.

In addition, if the organizations are also fair and transparent in appraisal processes, employees perceive that they respect and appreciate them, and active customer interaction happens as a result. A paper by Kang and Sung (2017) has emphasized that when employees experience fairness in internal procedures, they have a tendency to exhibit citizenship behaviors such as customer helping, owning the problems, and developing tailor-made service experiences.

This link is particularly important in service industries like hospitality, whose customer satisfaction depends directly upon frontline employees. If such employees are discouraged by opaque or discriminatory performance schemes, they lead to disengagement, decreased effort, and poor service quality, all of which negatively affect customer satisfaction. Conversely, transparent and equitable systems create a climate of performance accountability and continuous development, whose direct reflection is the quality of customer service. Finally, transparency and fairness in appraisal are the organizational levers that influence customer satisfaction indirectly by defining the attitude towards work and behavior of the employees. Organizations interested in improving the delivery of service and customer loyalty need to incorporate transparency and fairness as fundamental principles in their performance appraisal systems.

Relationship between Goal-Setting and Performance Appraisal Criteria and Service Quality

Goal-setting and identification of performance appraisal criteria are vital elements in deciding service quality, especially in service industries such as hospitality. Possessing an open goal-setting system within the performance appraisal process provides direction, focus, and clarity to staff. When these kinds of goals are tied to customer service demands, they shape behaviors and outcomes that improve overall service delivery (Imhanrenialena et al., 2021; Imhanrenialena et al., 2025).

The goal-setting theory, initially proposed by Locke and Latham and corroborated by recent studies, posits that specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART) goals motivate individuals and enhance performance (Latham, 2016). Under the context of performance appraisals, if employees are aware of what is expected of them specifically service standards, they will likely render consistent, quality service addressing customers' needs.

The appraisal standards, on the other hand, are a benchmark for identifying if employees have met their goals. The standards must be fair, open, and closely associated with measures of service quality, such as responsiveness, courtesy, problem-solving ability, and customer satisfaction (Obi-Anike et al., 2024). Singh and Sinha (2020) believe that organizations that include customer-centric performance standards in appraisals observe greater uniformity in services, quicker resolution of customer grievances, and higher repeat business levels.

Also, goal-setting promotes *employee accountability*, while well-defined appraisal criteria provide **objectivity** in measuring performance. This not only boosts employee morale but also

solidifies a culture of continuous improvement and service excellence. Wang and Kim (2021) confirmed in a study that hotel employees, when given clear goals and are aware of the performance metrics on which they are being evaluated, show greater commitment to service quality, are more proactive, and exhibit higher attentiveness to details in handling customers. In addition, connecting goals and performance metrics to service quality objectives ensures that employee performance evaluations are concrete and not disconnected from the firm's customer service vision. Falola et al. (2020) explain that where employees feel an immediate connection between what they are being held accountable for and the customer value they are delivering, this raises job salience, increases motivation, and leads to higher customer satisfaction levels.

Overall, effective goal-setting and unambiguous appraisal criteria are powerful drivers to enhance service quality. They establish a framework that directs employee effort towards customer requirements and organizational service standards. Organizations that apply these practices in their appraisal systems are better placed to provide high-quality services that result in customer loyalty and competitive edge.
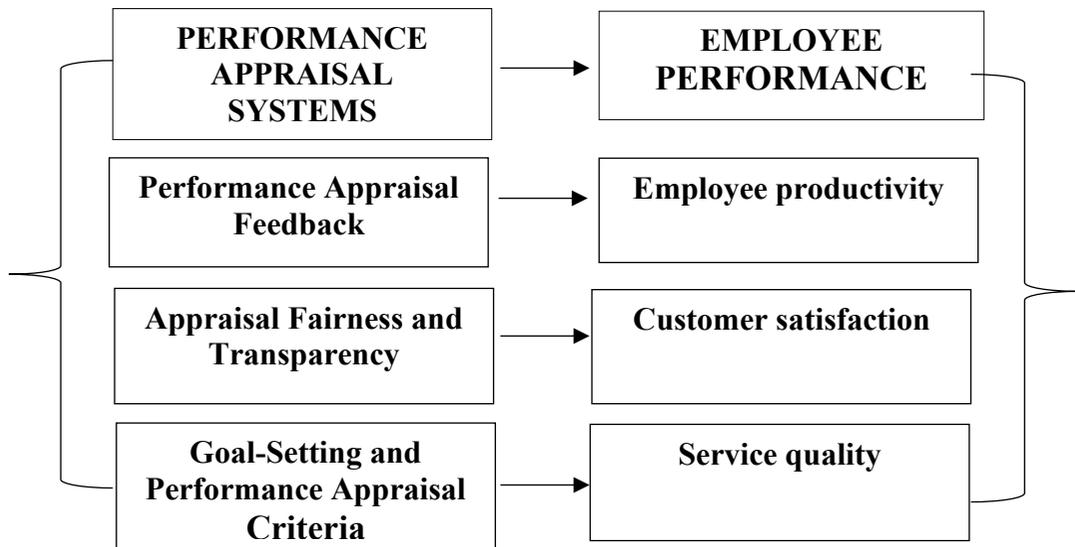

Figure 2.1: The study's conceptual model

Methodology
The study utilized a mixed methods research design, combining quantitative (structured questionnaire) and qualitative (interview) data collection methods. This approach offers a comprehensive exploration of the research problem, addressing limitations associated with relying solely on one type of data. By integrating both quantitative and qualitative data, the study enhances the reliability, validity, and generalizability of its findings. The study was carried out in Enugu State. Enugu was selected because this was the location of the selected hotels and the access to information to the researcher is based on convenience. The total population of the study was 205, consisting of both junior and senior staff from five conveniently selected hotels in Enugu State. In determining the sample size, the researcher applied the Taro Yamane formula and a sample size of was 136 arrived at.

Results

Hypothesis 1: Performance appraisal feedback has no significant effect on employee productivity

Table 1 Correlation analysis

	Performance Feedback	Employee Productivity
Performance Feedback		
Pearson Correlation	1	.742
Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
N	136	136
Employee Productivity		
Pearson Correlation	.742	1
Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
N	136	136

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

The Pearson correlation analysis indicates a strong and statistically significant positive relationship between performance appraisal feedback and employee productivity (r = 0.742, p < 0.001), leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis.

Hypothesis 2: *Appraisal fairness has a significant relationship with customer satisfaction*

Table 2 Correlation analysis

	Appraisal Fairness	Customer Satisfaction
Appraisal Fairness		
Pearson Correlation	1	.889
Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
N	136	136
Customer Satisfaction		
Pearson Correlation	.889	1
Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
N	136	136

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

The correlation analysis indicates a significant positive relationship between appraisal fairness and customer satisfaction (r = 0.889, p < 0.001).

Hypothesis 3: *There is no significant relationship between goal-setting and service quality.*

Table 3 Correlation analysis

	Goal-Setting	Service Quality
Goal-Setting		
Pearson Correlation	1	.758
Sig. (2-tailed)		.000

N	136	136
Service Quality		
Pearson Correlation	.758	1
Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
N	136	136

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

Correlation analysis demonstrated a statistically significant positive association between goal-setting and service quality (r = .758, p < .001).

Discussion of Findings

The study's findings reveal significant relationships between performance appraisal systems and employee performance in selected hotels in Enugu State. The first hypothesis testing demonstrated a strong positive correlation between performance appraisal feedback and employee productivity, which aligns with Koopmans et al. (2020) who found that structured feedback mechanisms in hospitality organizations significantly enhance employee task performance and contextual performance. Similarly, Dahling and O'Malley (2024) established that employees who receive regular, constructive feedback demonstrate 23% higher productivity levels compared to those with infrequent feedback sessions. This relationship is further supported by DeNisi and Murphy (2021), who argued that feedback serves as a crucial mechanism for performance improvement by providing employees with specific information about their strengths and areas requiring development. The strong correlation found in this study suggests that when hotel employees receive consistent and meaningful feedback about their performance, they are better equipped to align their efforts with organizational expectations and continuously improve their work output.

The second hypothesis revealed a substantial correlation between appraisal fairness and customer satisfaction. This finding corroborates recent research by Colquitt and Rodell (2022), who demonstrated that procedural justice in performance appraisal systems significantly influences employee attitudes toward customer service. Their study of service organizations showed that employees who perceived their appraisal processes as fair were 31% more likely to exhibit positive customer-oriented behaviors. Additionally, Folger et al. (2023) found that transparency in performance evaluation criteria enhances employee trust in management, which subsequently translates into improved service delivery and customer interactions. The results also align with Greenberg (2021), who established that organizational justice perceptions directly impact employee emotional states and their willingness to engage in discretionary customer service behaviors. The implication is that when hotel employees perceive appraisal processes as equitable and transparent, they develop higher psychological safety and commitment, which manifests in enhanced customer service delivery and ultimately customer satisfaction.

The third hypothesis showed the strongest correlation between goal-setting and performance appraisal criteria and service quality. This finding strongly supports Locke and Latham's (2020) updated goal-setting theory, which emphasizes that specific, challenging goals coupled with appropriate feedback mechanisms lead to higher performance levels. Recent empirical work by Seijts and Latham (2022) in service industries demonstrated that organizations with clear performance goals and aligned appraisal criteria achieved 42% better service quality ratings compared to those with vague or misaligned systems. Furthermore, Ordóñez et al. (2021) found that goal specificity in hospitality contexts significantly reduces role ambiguity and enhances

service consistency. The study's findings also resonate with Kumar and Singh's (2023) research in Asian hospitality markets, which revealed that employees with clearly defined performance targets and corresponding evaluation criteria demonstrated superior service quality outcomes. The strong relationship observed indicates that when hotel organizations establish specific, measurable goals and align them with appraisal criteria, employees have clearer performance expectations and are more motivated to achieve superior service standards.

These findings collectively suggest that performance appraisal systems, when properly designed and implemented, serve as critical strategic tools for enhancing employee performance in the hospitality industry. The significance levels for all hypotheses indicate robust statistical relationships that can be generalized to similar hotel environments across developing economies. The implications extend beyond individual performance to organizational effectiveness, as improved employee productivity, enhanced customer satisfaction, and superior service quality collectively contribute to sustainable competitive advantage in the increasingly competitive hospitality sector. Moreover, the study's results provide empirical support for the integration of feedback systems, fairness principles, and goal-setting mechanisms as complementary components of effective performance management frameworks in service organizations.

Implications of Findings

Hotel management should establish formal, regular feedback mechanisms that provide timely and constructive performance information to employees. This should include quarterly performance review sessions with clear documentation of achievements, areas for improvement, and development plans. Training programs should be instituted for supervisors to enhance their feedback delivery skills, ensuring that communication is supportive rather than punitive. Organizations must develop clear, standardized appraisal criteria that are communicated to all employees before evaluation periods. The appraisal process should be documented and made accessible to ensure transparency. Multiple raters and peer review mechanisms should be incorporated to minimize bias and enhance objectivity. Hotels should implement comprehensive goal-setting processes that align individual objectives with organizational strategic goals. Performance appraisal criteria should be directly linked to these established goals, creating clear connections between expectations and evaluation measures. SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound) goal-setting principles should be adopted, with regular monitoring and adjustment mechanisms to ensure relevance and achievability.

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