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DEFINED GOALS AND REWARD FOR EXCELLENCE AS CORRELATES OF PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL AND STAFF PRODUCTIVITY IN ACADEMIC LIBRARIES IN IMO STATE, NIGERIA.

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Abstract
This study examined defined goals and reward for excellence in performance appraisal and staff productivity in academic libraries in Imo State, Nigeria. The study was guided by three objectives, three research questions and three null hypotheses. A correlational survey design was adopted. The population comprised 209 library staff, and total enumeration was used. Data were collected with a structured questionnaire covering defined goals, reward for excellence and challenges associated with appraisal practices, and staff productivity. Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used to determine relationships for research questions and mean and standard deviation to answer research question 3. T-test was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. It was discovered that: there is a significant, positive and high extent of relationship between defined goals and reward for excellence in performance appraisal and staff productivity in academic libraries in Imo State and the challenges associated with performance appraisal include: inadequate resources, workload, irregular appraisal feedback, limited training for supervisors and perceived bias. The researchers recommended that: Library management should establish clearly defined performance goals to guide staff and improve productivity in academic libraries and academic library management should address the challenges affecting performance appraisal by ensuring transparency, leadership support, and adequate training for appraisers.

Keywords: Academic Libraries, Defined Goals, Feedback Mechanisms, Performance Appraisal, Staff Productivity.

Introduction

Academic libraries provide access to information resources, support scholarly communication, facilitate information literacy and assist students, lecturers and researchers in locating, evaluating and using information. Academic libraries depend on

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the competence and sustained productivity of their staff to translate collections, technologies and institutional resources into effective services for teaching, learning and research. The contemporary academic library is no longer limited to routine circulation and shelving activities. Library personnels increasingly work with electronic resources, digital discovery systems, research support, institutional repositories, user education, reference services and technology-mediated information services. These changing responsibilities make staff performance an important management concern.

Performance appraisal is an important human resource management practice through which employee's performance is assessed in relation to established expectations and organizational objectives. It provides a formal mechanism through which an organization assesses how employees perform assigned responsibilities and determines areas for improvement, development and recognition. In academic libraries, appraisal can be useful when it is linked to the actual duties of staff and to the goals of the library. Izah and Balarabe (2024) found that performance appraisal in Nigerian university libraries is used to identify staff strengths and weaknesses, provide feedback, assess growth potential, and identify training and development needs. This suggests that appraisal should be viewed not merely as an administrative exercise but as part of a continuing performance-improvement process.

One important component of effective appraisal is the use of clearly defined goals. Goals give staff a concrete understanding of expected outcomes, priorities and timelines. When goals are specific and measurable, appraisal can compare actual performance with agreed expectations rather than relying mainly on general impressions. Omarayen et al. (2024), in their study of university libraries in Akwa Ibom State, reported a strong positive relationship between clearly defined goals in performance appraisal and staff productivity. Their recommendation that library managers should establish specific, clear and challenging goals provided a relevant basis for examining the same issue.

Reward for excellence in performance appraisal refers to the recognition, compensation, or incentives given to employees who demonstrate outstanding performance, dedication, and achievement of organizational goals. In organizations, including academic libraries, rewards may come in the form of promotions, salary increments, bonuses, commendations, certificates, or other motivational incentives

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designed to encourage high performance among staff. The essence of rewarding excellence is to motivate employees to maintain efficiency, commitment, and productivity in their duties. A well-structured reward system linked to performance appraisal helps employees perceive fairness and value in the organization, thereby increasing job satisfaction and morale. According to Robbins and Judge (2019), employee rewards and recognition significantly influence motivation and performance because workers tend to exert greater effort when exceptional performance is acknowledged and appreciated. In academic libraries, rewarding excellent performance can encourage librarians and other staff members to improve service delivery, embrace innovation, and contribute effectively toward achieving institutional objectives.

In the university library context, staff productivity is reflected through clearly defined goals and the demonstration of professional competencies across various areas of specialization. This includes intellectual and professional contributions to the advancement of knowledge, the capacity to assess and understand the diverse needs of library users, and the ability to design and provide information resources and services that effectively meet those needs (Okon et al., 2018). It also involves a sound understanding of professional ethics and adherence to the core values and principles that guide the library and information science profession. However, the absence of clear strategic direction from library management, improper assessment of employees' capabilities, time constraints that prevent thorough evaluation, and an unfavorable working environment and favoritism have been identified as major obstacles to effective performance appraisal. These shortcomings not only distort appraisal outcomes but also diminish the credibility of the entire process.

Statement of the Problem

Academic libraries in Imo State operate in an environment where staff are expected to maintain efficient information services while adapting to changing technologies, user expectations and institutional demands. For staff to perform these responsibilities effectively, management needs a credible way of communicating expected standards, assessing performance and guiding improvement. Performance appraisal is intended to perform this function, yet its usefulness depends on how the appraisal process is implemented. From all indications, library staff are not assessed in line with defined goals

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and feedback mechanism that are sufficiently clear, measurable as well as directly connected with their assigned responsibilities. Expectations are vague , with subjective appraisal that are uncertain with what constitutes successful performance .More so, appraisal systems only record ratings without communicating the results to the library staff which brings about limited developmental values .

The fact that feedback rating system does not absolutely enable library staff to understand their strengths and weaknesses , identify their performance gap , clarify their expectation and provide guidance for improvement .Appraisal do not automatically provide high productivity as library staff still encounter insufficient opportunities for professional development , irregular communication of appraisal outcomes, lack of proper skills and all these weaken the development of defined goals and feedback mechanisms.

There is therefore a need for evidence focused on academic libraries in Imo State. The present study addresses this gap by examining the relationship of defined goals and feedback mechanisms with staff productivity and by identifying challenges that may hinder effective use of these appraisal mechanisms.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What relationship exists between defined goals in performance appraisal and staff productivity in academic libraries in Imo State?
2. What relationship exists between reward for excellence in performance appraisal and staff productivity in academic libraries in Imo State?
3. What challenges affect the use of defined goals and reward for excellence in performance appraisal and staff productivity in academic libraries in Imo State?

Hypotheses

Ho_1: There is no significant relationship between defined goals in performance appraisal and staff productivity in academic libraries in Imo State.

Ho_2: There is no significant relationship between reward for excellence in performance appraisal and staff productivity in academic libraries in Imo State.

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Literature Review

Performance appraisal refers to a systematic process of evaluating an employee's work against established expectations and using the results for managerial and developmental decisions. It is commonly referred to by various terms such as employee rating, employee evaluation, performance review, performance evaluation, and result appraisal (Mathis & Jackson, as cited in Udo-Anyanwu and Uwandu, 2021). In an academic library, appraisal can cover service delivery, technical processing, reference and information services, digital-resource support, user education, teamwork, professional development and other responsibilities attached to a staff member's role. Izah and Balarabe (2024) observed that Nigerian university libraries use appraisal for purposes including identifying strengths and weaknesses, providing feedback, assessing growth potential and identifying training needs. An effective appraisal process should therefore provide more than a numerical rating. It should create an evidence-based conversation about performance, clarify expectations and connect identified gaps with appropriate support. Omarayen et al. (2024) demonstrated that different components of appraisal can have different relationships with staff productivity, making it useful to examine individual appraisal mechanism rather than treating appraisal as a single undifferentiated activity in defined goals.

Defined goals provide a reference point for both employees effort and managerial assessment. In practical terms, a defined goal should communicate what is to be achieved, the expected standard, the time frame and, where appropriate, indicators for determining completion. In a library, goals may involve timely cataloguing of materials, response time for reference enquiries, digitisation targets, user-education activities, database support, preservation tasks or completion of assigned administrative responsibilities. Performance appraisal systems that articulate specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART) performance expectations enable librarians to understand their roles, align their activities with institutional objectives, and work toward clearly articulated targets (Adeniran & Johnston, 2021). Consequently, defined goals serve as a foundation for monitoring performance and ensuring that staff activities contribute meaningfully to the mission and vision of the library. Omarayen et al. (2024) found that clearly defined goals in performance appraisal had a strong positive relationship with staff productivity in

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university libraries in Akwa Ibom State. This finding suggests that goal clarity can help staff focus attention on priority tasks and provide supervisors with clearer criteria for judging performance. Pelemo and Adeleke (2024) also reported that mentoring activities among librarians in south-west Nigerian university libraries included setting specific goals and timelines with benchmarks or dates, while mentoring itself had a moderate relationship with job performance. According to Okoye, Eze, and Obi (2023), academic librarians were more engaged, responsive, and proactive when appraisal criteria were well-defined and communicated regularly. Their study showed that staff members who received clear guidance regarding goals, rewards and performance expectations demonstrated higher levels of commitment and enthusiasm toward their work.

Rewards and recognition are widely acknowledged as powerful motivators in performance management and have a strong association with increased employee productivity. In modern organizations, performance appraisal systems are not only used to assess employee performance but also to reward outstanding contributions. As stated by Armstrong & Taylor (2020) when employees perceive that their efforts are recognized and rewarded appropriately, they are more likely to remain committed to their work and strive for higher levels of productivity. In academic libraries, where staff often operate in knowledge-intensive environments and are responsible for delivering high-quality information services, rewarding excellence through performance appraisal systems can significantly enhance staff morale and job performance. However, the absence of reward mechanisms or perceived inequity in the distribution of rewards can have negative consequences for employee productivity. When employees consistently perform well but receive no recognition for their efforts, they may feel undervalued and demotivated. Zhou and Wang (2021) reported that employees who consistently demonstrated high performance but were not recognized through appraisal systems exhibited declining motivation and reduced commitment to their work. In academic libraries, such dissatisfaction can result in decreased enthusiasm for service delivery, reduced collaboration among staff members, and lower overall productivity which will in turn affect individual excellence.

Reward for excellence also serves as an incentive that stimulates employees to exert greater effort in their work. Armstrong and Taylor (2020) noted that reward

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systems play an essential role in motivating employees because they provide tangible evidence that the organization values their contributions. In academic libraries, recognition for outstanding service—such as awards for best librarian, commendation letters, or opportunities to attend international conferences—can inspire staff members to improve their performance and develop innovative approaches to service delivery. Librarians in such environments complete tasks with greater accuracy and efficiency compared to those in institutions where reward mechanisms are absent. Furthermore, librarians who received recognition for excellence are more willing to adopt innovative practices in library service delivery, such as implementing new digital tools, improving user education programmes, and developing creative approaches to information dissemination. Zhou and Wang (2021) reported that employees who consistently demonstrated high performance but were not recognized through appraisal systems exhibited declining motivation and reduced commitment to their work. In academic libraries, such dissatisfaction can result in decreased enthusiasm for service delivery, reduced collaboration among staff members, and lower overall productivity.

Staff productivity in academic libraries can be reflected in the quality, quantity, timeliness and usefulness of work performed in support of library objectives. Bankole et al. (2023), for example, reported a significant relationship between staff motivation and job performance among library personnel in public libraries in Kwara State. Evidence from academic libraries suggests that development and management practices can support performance. Osiesi et al. (2022) found a positive and statistically significant relationship between professional development and job performance among library staff at Federal University Oye-Ekiti. Udem et al. (2025) similarly reported a moderate positive relationship between staff development and job performance in federal university libraries in South-East Nigeria. Adekoya and Busayo (2023) found high levels of distributed leadership and job performance among librarians in Nigerian higher educational institutions, further indicating the importance of management practices to staff performance.

Defined goals and reward for excellence can complement these practices. Goals establish direction, while feedback provides information about progress toward the direction. When both are present, staff have a clearer basis for adjusting work behaviour.

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However, the strength of these relationships may depend on resources, supervisor competence and the fairness of the appraisal environment. Performance appraisal may be weakened by organizational and contextual constraints. According to Prentice in Okpe (2022), the appraisal system is a general assessment that does not address the peculiarities and differences in the activities of the different units in the library. Consequently, the present study treats challenges as an important contextual component of the relationship between appraisal practices and productivity. Closely related to the generalized nature of appraisal systems is their inability to disclose specific knowledge, skills, and attitudes (KSAs) possessed by library staff. It can be argued, without equivocation, that general-purpose annual appraisal systems cannot effectively capture the specialized competencies required for technical library work. This challenge is particularly evident in cataloguing units, where staff performance depends heavily on intellectual precision, consistency, and adherence to international bibliographic standards (Cintrón & Flaniken, 2017). Their findings revealed dissatisfaction with the appraisal process due to lack of leadership support, weak supervisory accountability, and inadequate training for appraisers. Recent studies have reinforced these findings. For instance, Onuoha and Ogbuiyi (2018) found that appraisal systems in Nigerian university libraries rarely assess specialized competencies such as metadata creation, digital cataloguing tools, and electronic resource management, despite their growing relevance.

Methodology

The study adopted a correlational survey design. The design was considered appropriate because the study sought to determine the relationships between defined goals, feedback mechanisms, challenges and staff productivity without manipulating the variables. The study used 209 library staff in four academic libraries in Imo State as the population. Total enumeration was adopted so that all the 209 library staff were included in the study. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire titled Defined Goals, Feedback Mechanisms and Staff Productivity Questionnaire (DGFMSPQ). The instrument contained four sections: Section A for demographic information; Section B for defined goals; Section C for feedback mechanisms; and Section D for challenges and staff

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productivity. Items in Sections B–D were measured on a four-point scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD).The instrument was designed from the study objectives and reviewed for content coverage and clarity. For the field study, the instruments were subjected to expert validation and pilot testing before final administration. Because no raw pilot-test data were supplied for this paper, a numerical reliability coefficient were not fabricated here; the reliability coefficient were inserted after the actual pilot data are analyzed .Mean and standard deviation were used to summarize responses to the item statements. Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used to determine the relationship between each major appraisal component and staff productivity. The null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance. For the four-point scale, a criterion mean of 2.50 was used: item means of 2.50 and above indicated agreement, while means below 2.50 indicated disagreement.

Results and Discussion

Research Question One: What is the coefficient of relationship between defined goals in performance appraisal and staff productivity in academic libraries in Imo State?

Table 1: **The Coefficient of Relationship between Defined Goals in Performance Appraisal and Staff Productivity in Academic Libraries in Imo State**

Variable	n	R	r^2	Remark
Staff Productivity				
	209	0.681	0.464	Positive & HER
Defined Goals in Performance Appraisal				

Data presented in Table 1 showed that the coefficient of relationship between defined goals in performance appraisal and staff productivity in academic libraries in Imo State is 0.681, while the coefficient of determination is 0.464. The coefficient of relationship is positive and within the range of 0.61–0.80 for high extent of relationship. The coefficient of determination indicates that 46.40% of the variations in staff productivity are explained by defined goals in performance appraisal.

Hypothesis One: The coefficient of relationship between defined goals in performance appraisal and staff productivity in academic libraries in Imo State is not significant.

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Table 2: **Summary t-values Table for Testing Hypothesis One**

t-Cal	Df	t-Crit	P	α	Decision
14.108	207	1.646	0.000	0.05	Rejected

Data presented in Table 2 showed that the calculated t-value of 14.108 is greater than the critical or tabulated t-value of 1.646. Also, the obtained probability value of 0.000 is less than the set probability value of 0.05. Since the calculated t-value is greater than the tabulated t-value and the obtained probability value is less than the set probability value, the null hypothesis one which states that "the coefficient of relationship between defined goals in performance appraisal and staff productivity in academic libraries in Imo State is not significant" is rejected. Therefore, there is a significant relationship between defined goals in performance appraisal and staff productivity in academic libraries in Imo State.

The summary of the findings above revealed that there is a positive and high extent of relationship between defined goals in performance appraisal and staff productivity in academic libraries in Imo State. The statistical test further revealed that the relationship is significant .This implies that clearly stated and measurable goals in performance appraisal help library staff understand their responsibilities, expectations, and organizational objectives, thereby improving their productivity. When library staff is aware of clearly outlined targets and expectations, they become more focused, committed, and motivated to perform their duties effectively. The finding is in line with Omar yen et al. (2024) who found that clearly defined goals in performance appraisal had a strong positive relationship with staff productivity in university libraries in Akwa Ibom State. Similarly, Okoye, Eze, and Obi (2023) emphasized that academic librarians are more engaged, responsive, and proactive when appraisal criteria are well-defined and communicated regularly. The implication of this finding is that academic libraries that establish clearly defined goals for staff performance appraisal are more likely to achieve higher staff productivity and improved library service delivery.

Research Question Two: What is the coefficient of relationship between reward for excellence in performance appraisal and staff productivity in academic libraries in Imo State?

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Table 3: **The Coefficient of Relationship between Reward for Excellence in Performance Appraisal and Staff Productivity in Academic Libraries in Imo State**

Variable	N	R	r^2	Remark
Staff Productivity				
	209	0.803	0.645	Positive & VHER
Reward for Excellence in Performance Appraisal				

Data presented in Table 3 showed that the coefficient of relationship between reward for excellence in performance appraisal and staff productivity is 0.803, while the coefficient of determination is 0.645. The coefficient of relationship falls within the range of 0.81–1.00 for very high extent of relationship. Therefore, there is a positive and very high extent of relationship between reward for excellence in performance appraisal and staff productivity in academic libraries in Imo State.

Hypothesis Two: The coefficient of relationship between reward for excellence in performance appraisal and staff productivity in academic libraries in Imo State is not significant.

Table 4: **Summary t-values Table for Testing Hypothesis Four**

t-Cal	Df	t-Crit	P	α	decision
19.402	207	1.646	0.000	0.05	rejected

Data presented in Table 4 showed that the calculated t-value of 19.402 is greater than the critical value of 1.646. Also, the obtained probability value of 0.000 is less than the set probability value of 0.05. Therefore, the null hypothesis four is rejected. Hence, there is a significant relationship between reward for excellence in performance appraisal and staff productivity in academic libraries in Imo State.

The result of the study above revealed that there is a positive and very high extent of relationship between reward for excellence in performance appraisal and staff

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productivity in academic libraries in Imo State. The relationship was also found to be statistically significant. This finding implies that rewarding outstanding performance motivates library staff to put more effort into their duties. Reward systems such as promotion, recognition, incentives, and commendation encourage healthy competition among staff and increase job satisfaction. Employees who feel appreciated and recognized for their efforts are more likely to remain committed to organizational goals. This finding supports the motivational theory of Herzberg, which emphasizes recognition and achievement as important motivators of employee performance. The finding also agrees with Johnson and Nkwocha (2022) who found that academic librarians working in institutions where high-performing staff received rewards demonstrate higher levels of engagement and commitment to their duties. In the same vein, Zhou and Wang (2021) reported that employees who consistently demonstrate high performance but are not rewarded through appraisal systems always exhibit declining motivation and reduced commitment to their work. The implication of this finding is that academic libraries should strengthen reward and recognition systems in order to sustain high productivity among staff.

Research Question Three: What are the challenges affecting staff performance appraisal in academic libraries in Imo State?

Table 5: **Mean Ratings on the Challenges Affecting Staff Performance Appraisal in Academic Libraries in Imo State**

S/N	Items	Mean	SD	Decision
1	Generalized nature of appraisal systems	3.2	0.71	Agreed
2	Ineffectiveness of annual performance appraisal systems	3.1	0.80	Agreed
3	Inability to capture knowledge, skills, and attitudes	3.0	0.77	Agreed
4	Lack of leadership support and supervisory commitment	3.2	0.69	Agreed
5	Inadequate training of appraisers	3.0	0.82	Agreed
6	Limited scope of existing studies and institutional coverage	2.9	0.84	Agreed
	Grand Mean	3.07	0.77	Agreed

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Data presented in Table 5 showed that all the items have mean scores above the criterion mean of 2.50. This indicates that the respondents agreed that generalized appraisal systems, ineffective annual appraisal systems, inability to capture knowledge and skills, lack of leadership support, inadequate training of appraisers, and limited institutional coverage are major challenges affecting staff performance appraisal in academic libraries in Imo State.

The findings also revealed that generalized appraisal systems, ineffective annual appraisal procedures, inability to capture knowledge and skills, lack of leadership support, inadequate training of appraisers, and limited institutional coverage are major challenges affecting staff performance appraisal in academic libraries in Imo State. These challenges reduced the effectiveness of performance appraisal systems and limit their ability to improve staff productivity. When appraisal systems are poorly implemented, staff may lose confidence in the process and perceive it as unfair or biased. This finding agrees with the study of Prentice in Okpe (2022) who identified generalized appraisal systems as major obstacles to effective performance appraisal systems in Nigerian institutions. Similarly, Cintrón and Flaniken (2017) who identified lack of leadership support as a major factor contributing to dissatisfaction with appraisal processes. The implication of this finding is that academic library management should improve appraisal procedures by ensuring transparency, objectivity, and adequate training of supervisors and evaluators.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study recommends that:

1. Academic library management should establish specific, measurable and time-bound performance goals for each category of staff and ensure that the goals correspond with actual job responsibilities.
2. Reward systems such as promotion, recognition, commendation, and incentives should be strengthened to encourage outstanding staff performance.
3. Academic library management should address the challenges affecting performance appraisal by ensuring transparency, leadership support, and adequate training for appraisers.

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4. Library management should ensure regular and constructive feedback mechanisms during appraisal exercisers for efficient staff productivity.

Conclusion

The study concludes that defined goals and reward for excellence occupied an important place in performance appraisal and staff productivity in academic libraries in Imo State. Clear goals help staff understand expected outcomes and priorities, while reward for excellence motivates staff for better performance However, the effectiveness of these mechanisms can be reduced by inadequate funding, workload pressures, limited development opportunities and weaknesses in appraisal communication. Performance appraisal is therefore the most likely to support productivity when it is continuous, participatory, transparent and linked to practical staff development.

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