ISA Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences (ISAJAHSS)

Homepage: https://isapublisher.com/isajahss/

Vol 3, Issue 6, Nov-Dec - 2026 ISSN: 3049-1827

Challenges of Annual Performance Evaluation Report (APER) System to Employee Performance in Nigeria's Public Service System

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Received: 25.09.2026 | **Accepted:** 09.11.2026 | **Published:** 19.11.2026

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DOI: *10.5281/zenodo.24359726*

Abstract **Original Research Article**

This study investigated the challenges of annual performance evaluation report (APER) system to employee performance in Nigeria's public service system. The specific objectives were to identify APER's challenges, explore how it undermines suitable job placement, efficiency, proper promotion and retention, and staff competencies and behaviours. Anchored on Expectancy Theory, the study adopted the Ex Post Facto research design utilising qualitative method of data collection based on secondary sources and content analysis. Findings revealed a number of challenges of APER which include, lack of training and resources, subjectivity and lack of transparency, bureaucratic inefficiency, politicisation, unclear performance indicators, weak feedback mechanisms, lack of alignment between appraisals and career progression, its treatment as annual ritual replete with appraisal errors and reliability, validity and rating biases. Further revealed was that APER undermines suitable job placement given a high rate of subjective indices warranting placement of officers at unsuitable positions. More so, APER implementation undermines employees' efficiency and poor service delivery preceded by poor scrutiny of staff performance and handling jobs with laxity and levity across agencies. Besides, APER undermines proper promotion and retention as there are no stipulated standards to qualify for good conduct, efficient performance and acceptable qualifications for promotion. Ultimately, manipulations of the APER system result in turnover and recycling of incompetent and poor quality public officers. The study recommends that the newly introduced Performance Management System to replace APER should be strictly implemented in accordance with set objectives to avoid the pitfalls of APER.

Keywords: APER System, Employee Performance, Public Service, Efficiency, Competence.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Assessment of employee's performance is important in every establishment in Nigeria. Therefore, appraisal calls for vital procedure in order to actualise the stipulated objective. Civil service has prominent roles to play in service delivery and in ensuring adequate capacity of the workforce through appraisal system. The appraisal of employees has the advantage of facilitating an organisation to position the workforce in the jobs for which they are best suited to improve productivity. Knowledgeable and competent employees are regarded as key assets for organisation to survive and sustain its competitive advantage. Therefore, organisational performance is enhanced through employee-oriented human resource practices that can build up employees'

capability, commitment and productivity (Posthuma, Masimova& Campion, 2013) Hence, APER defines the methods and processes used by organisations to enhance work design, process and feedback. The effectiveness of the civil service in terms of service delivery is a key factor in achieving the goals. Thus, performance appraisal is a significant instrument in enhancing civil service performance. In the view of Sonnentag (2003) APER is the actions that expedite the accomplishment of organisational goals, delivery of the products and services.

The Annual Performance Evaluation Report (APER) has over the decades functioned as a form-based appraisal system designed to assess public servants annually against assigned duties, behavioural standards, and specific work targets. Introduced as part of Nigeria's post-independence administrative reforms, APER was intended to promote accountability, identify training needs, inform promotions, and support overall career progression within the civil service(Okafor, 2023). Its centrality to personnel management made it a cornerstone of Nigeria's bureaucratic tradition, with the expectation that it would enhance productivity and efficiency across government institutions.

Performance assessment of civil servants plays a vital role in the implementation of employee promotion policy of the Federal Government of Nigeria. One of the most fundamental features of any human resource management that is relevant to individual and organizational growth is performance appraisal. In order to enhance the performance of civil officers, the Nigerian government introduced the Annual Performance Evaluation Report (APER) which serves as the basis for regular evaluation of the performance of the civil servants. The main objective of the APER is to give feedback to the employee on ways to improve subsequent performance, thereby enhancing productivity and efficiency in an organization's Performance. Despite its significance, there seems to be inherent subjectivity that is associated with its implementation.

Despite its long-standing use, APER has been increasingly criticized for failing to achieve these objectives. Scholars and practitioners have noted that the system is retrospective, heavily paper-based, and vulnerable to bias and manipulation (Sakpere, 2022; Ademeso&Lawal, 2025). The process often degenerates into a ritualistic exercise, with supervisors completing forms perfunctorily rather than providing meaningful, evidence-based evaluations. This tendency undermines its credibility as a performance measurement tool and limits its developmental impact on employees. Furthermore, APER has been accused of lacking clear and measurable performance indicators that link individual contributions to organizational outcomes, thereby weakening its effectiveness in driving institutional productivity. Consequently, critics have described the system as "subjective, ineffective, and outdated" (Yemi–Esan, 2020).

It is therefore against this background of indispensability of the public service that this study examines if the reason for the decadence in the Nigeria public service is attributable to the human constraints to the effective implementation of APER.

1.1. Statement of the Problem

The Annual Performance Evaluation Report (APER) has served for decades as the dominant appraisal system in Nigeria's public service, intended to enhance accountability, identify training needs, and guide promotions and career development (Okafor, 2023). However, despite its longevity, scholars have made some observations which suggest that APER has not lived up to its objectives. They argue that the system appears retrospective, form-driven, and vulnerable to bias, with supervisors often completing reports mechanically rather than based on verifiable evidence of performance (Sakpere, 2022; Ademeso&Lawal, 2025). They claim that use of APER has become an annual ritual warranting its practice to be perceived as subjective, ineffective, and outdated (Yemi-Esan, 2020).

The APER system has also been accused of failure to provide clear performance indicators linking individual effort to organizational results (Anuma, 2023), which neither drives productivity nor ensures the professional development of staff in line with evolving institutional needs (Argungu cited in Swiftreporters, 2025). This warrants the call for reforms of this performance appraisal in order to that

foster objectivity, accountability that aligns with national strategic objectives (Adeniyi, 2024; Akinyemi, 2023). This gap between policy framework and practical implementation for effective service delivery raises critical questions about the credibility, functionality, and impact of performance management systems on the public sector.

1.2. Objectives of the Study

The objectives were to:

i. identify the challenges to APER system of appraisal in the Nigerian public service;

ii. explore the rate at which APER appraisal system undermines suitable job placement in the Nigerian public service;

iii. ascertain the extent to which the implementation of APER system undermines efficiency of employees in the Nigerian public service;

iv. analyse how the implementation of APER undermines proper promotion and retention in the Nigerian public service; and

v. verify the extent to which the implementation of APER undermine staff competencies and behaviours in the Nigerian public service

1.3. Research Questions

The following pertinent questions were raised to guide the study

i. What are the challenges of APER system of appraisal in the Nigerian public service?

ii. At what rate does the APER appraisal system undermine suitable job placement in the Nigerian public service?

iii. How does the implementation of APER system undermine efficiency of employees in the Nigerian public service?

iv. How does the implementation of APER undermine proper promotion and retention in the Nigerian public service?

v. To what extent has the implementation of APER undermine staff competencies and behaviours in the Nigerian public service?

2.0 Conceptual Clarification

2.1 Public Service

There is a distinction between the meaning of civil service and public service in Nigeria. This also applies to the terms civil servant and public servant. Those whose appointment, discipline, promotion transfer, retirement etc, are under the various civil service commissions of the federal government or the states are the core civil servants. They are subject to the civil service rules and regulations including the financial instructions among others. On the flipside, those working in other governmental agencies and the arm forces, Para-military agencies and other special departments whose appointment, promotion, discipline among others are based on delegated authorities and powers are not subject to the various civil services rules and scheme of service. Therefore, they fall under the purview of public servants (Ademeso&Lawal, 2025). The description of the concept of Public or Civil Service as established by the Nigerian Constitution is provided for in sections 171, 172, 206, 208 and 318 and in section 10 of Third Schedule of the 1999 Constitution, as amended (FGN, 1999).

2.2. Concept of the Annual Performance Evaluation Report (APER)

A performance evaluation also referred to as performance review or appraisal is a process that guides organisations in assessing employees' work quality and skills over a specific period. In traditional parlance, employers hold performance evaluations once or twice a year and scored team members based on their job description, core competencies, and company values. Ideally, performance review cycle commences with evaluation questions that set clear expectations for employees. As the review cycle progresses, team members will need continuous feedback and coaching so they can develop their skill sets and ensure their work contributes to high-priority organisational outcomes (Leapsome.com,

2025). In another lens, Sharma et al (2024) sees performance appraisal as a structured plan to review the performance of an employee, which involves a lot while performing a detailed assessment aimed at providing constructive feedback.

Evaluation report constitutes the determination of the changes in the skill, Knowledge and the attitude of the employee and the working environment within a specific period of time. Evaluation is concerned with the determination of whether changes in skills and knowledge have taken place as result of training while evaluation exists to check or minimize waste arising from training costs. Evaluation involves the measurement of performance, whereas performance is linked with motivation. Attempts to measure motivation and morale have raised problems. The organisations that concentrate their focus on people within the organization need to be aware of that which motivates people within them. Looking at the concept of evaluation, Alan and Rose (1994: 93) noted that evaluating human behaviour is subject to understanding human nature. In existence are some theories on human needs, and desires, which are determinants of human behaviour both within and outside the organization. The motivating factors for satisfying these needs and desires are predicated on our attitude to work and our relationship with others.

Other scholars have attempted to provide conceptual explanation of performance appraisal. Fisher et al. (2003) describe performance appraisal as the part of performance management process in which employees' roles in the organization dung a definite interval is evaluated. Ijewereme (2013) posits that performance appraisal is a method through which an organization identifies the drawbacks and potency of its employees in other to invigorate them and improve their weaknesses for the advancement of the employees and the organization. To this end, DeNisi and Pritchard (2006) added that performance appraisal denotes the methods and processes used by organisations to assess the employees' performance level. This process often includes measurement of employees' performance while providing them with feedback in respect of the level and quality of their performance.

The term performance appraisal (or performance evaluation) refers to the methods and processes used by organizations to assess the level of performance of their employees. This processusually includes measuring employees' performance and providing them with feedback regarding the level and quality of their performance (DeNisi and Pritchard, 2006).

There are different types of performance appraisal systems that organizations can choose from, depending on their suitability. These include: open appraisal, confidential appraisal or open secret appraisal. Each appraisal system has its merit and demerits, but the adoption would require the need to take cognizance of objectivity, fairness, and equity in the evaluation of employees' performance.

Open appraisal according to Asadu et al (2020) produces a path where employees' strengths and weaknesses are disclosed through the appraisal process. The employee's achievements and shortcomings are relayed to them during performance counseling interactions. Asadu et al. (2020) accentuates that the information obtained by employees about the assessment has considerable effect on their self-esteem and work efficiency. Conveying a good report is considerably less difficult for the appraiser and the employee than when performance leaves much to be desired. An open appraisal system reveals and creates self-consciousness which is a process of giving insight into one's performance. It helps the employee become more reflective and objective about themselves and future planning, which establishes an action plan for the coming year in terms of fixing targets, activities, and responsibilities (Boswell & Boudreau, 2000).

Confidential appraisal is one under which employees that are appraised are not allowed to be part of the appraisal process. Mathias and Johnson (20l0) states that, in the confidential appraisal, the appraisee is not drafted in the appraisal exercise, and the appraisal outcome is not communicated to them. Confidential appraisal leaves appraised employees in doubt about their performance level and does not create room for future improvement in case they performed below expectation. Some managers may not want to give feedback to their subordinates particularly when performance is poor for reasons such as creating

disharmony in the workplace, causing employee turnover, putting employees under stress, and discouraging workers.

The open secret or semi-open and semi-secret appraisal system entails having the appraisal procedure open at the beginning and later confidential. The open secret appraisal necessitates employees to fill out an assessment form, thereafter, the manager rates the employee and returns their rating to them to respond and append their signature. However, the employees appraised will not be given feedback about the outcome of the appraisal (Asadu et al., 2020). The performance of the organisation depends on the individual occupying different positions in the organizational structure. These positions are interdependent and not exclusive. Each position or unit of the system is strategic and goal oriented. This is the reason for the evaluation of every individual in the civil service either annually or bi-annually to ascertain the performance of individuals in the achievement of the set goals or realization of the objective set and agreed upon. For sustainable service, evaluation which is a good appraisal or evaluation system is very fundamental to personnel. It is indispensable as it functions to assess goals achievements, motivate personnel for better performance, reward performance negatively or positively, render priorities and expose weak areas in the social system. With the right type of evaluation the right kind of people will occupy position commensurate with their performance capabilities. This explains why the Nigerian Institute of Personnel Management (cited in UK Essays, 2018) described performance appraisal as a technique for stock taking provides an opportunity to reassess individual performance be it quarterly, mid-yearly or annually. Thus, it serves as a barometer to evaluate the performance and progress of the country in a way since public servants are the actual implementers of the policies and programmes of the government.

2.3 Evolution of the Annual Performance Evaluation Report (APER) System in Nigeria Public Service

From the global perspective, performance appraisal is an age-long practice that has evolved in different dimensions since the existence of man. For purposes of formal periodisation, performance appraisal of an individual is reported to have begun as early as the third century in the Wei dynasty in China where an Imperial Rater appraised the performance of members of the official family (Locker, 1997). In 1648, it was further reported that Dublin (Ireland) evaluated legislators by using a rating scale based on personal qualities (Jamieson, 1999). However, Robert Owen introduced performance appraisal as a mechanism for assessing workers performance (Wren, 1994). Owen used a wooden coloured block to measure the achievement of employees working in the cotton Mills in Scotland at the close of work hours. During that period, it was used as a disciplinary measure to punish poor performance (Kennedy & Dresser, 2001). The above scenario presented a negative notion of the appraisal system which in turn made both the appraiser and the appraisee to despise it. However, as time went on, organisations made attempts to define the methods which linked it to other administrative matters such as reward, promotion, training among others, contending that employees achievements should not only be measured but evaluated and managed (Kennedy & Dresser, 2001). Thus, appraisal evolved as an inevitable and universal tool in examining workers performance and sustaining organisational effectiveness, Nigeria inclusive.

In the case of Nigerian Public Service, there are several methods used in performance appraisal. Some of these include the secret appraisal, essay method, graphic rating scale, ranking method, forced choice rating and management by objectives. Performance appraisal is a strategic tool necessary for the growth, survival, and success of any organization.

The open APER system which is an annual evaluation procedure in which employees' work ethics, skills and capabilities are assessed for their suitability and training was an outcome of the Udoji report of 1979 (Mustapha, 2008). Prior to 1979, Confidential Reporting System was operational in the public service in which appraisal was done secretly without informing theappraises of the results of the evaluation. Thus, it was based on the recommendations of the Udoji report which

proffered the Open Reporting System and Management by Objectives (MBO) techniques, as part of the public service reform that the APER was introduced in Nigeria public service. This brand of APER brought a dramatic reform in the evaluation of system that provided the workers (employees) with the opportunity to read and agree to the written appraisal report on them as well as their right to challenge the ratings by the superior officer. The Udoji also recommended continuous job evaluation and grading (UK Essays, 2018).

In the Nigerian public service system, the annual appraisal process begins in November of each year with the distribution of the appraisal forms to the public servants by the personnel departments. The staff fills the required portions of the forms and submits to the reviewing officer. Due to the well defined time period for the distribution and subsequent submission of forms, is it possible for the evaluation process to be conducted on time, providing sufficient time to the employees and reviewing officers to prepare for proper evaluation and interview. The evaluation interview is structured in form of a coaching-style system where a kind of answers and questions session ensue for both sides to defend its position and reach an agreement on final grade for the ratee; meanwhile the final decision falls on the rater. On the whole, the appraisal system is tied to a reward structure in form of performance based bonuses, earmarked for payment at the end of each year for good performance. The bonus paid is calculated as a percentage of ratee's annual pay based one's position in the organisation. On the flipside, public servants who fall short of expected performance are either served a query or warned verbally (UK Essays, 2018). Section 3 of the Nigerian Public Service Rule is emphatic on this matter and states in Rule No 06301: "The object of Annual Performance Evaluation Reports is to provide a full record of each officer's work, conduct and his suitability for promotion may be judged by the Federal Civil Service Commission (Federal Government of Nigeria, 2021).

In order that the commission may be in a position to weigh, in connection with a particular vacancy as well as the merits of officers, it is important that it knows precisely what work the officer has been engaged upon and the judgment form on that work. Given this mandate, the Federal Civil Service Commission must have to receive an indication of each officer's suitability for appointment to a senior grade in which he would have to perform administrative or supervisory duties. Therefore, information as to whether the officer's work in the appointment he holds was of fullest satisfaction, or on the contrary unsuitable for more responsible duties. The Federal Civil Service Commission particularly desires to have a record or expression of opinion as to each officer's suitability for promotion when, by his seniority, he may be regarded as eligible to be considered for such advancement. Federal Government of Nigeria (2000) Section 06304 adds the necessity of supplying the fullest information in replying to questions in the APER form so that the information could be used for the sake of promotion without reference to anybody or the officer's file or to any other documents. There is also in the form a provision that allows a civil servant who had filled the APER to vet or endorse or disagree with the comment of his superior or supervising officer. Thus, in the spirit of the provision is to allow fairness and objectivity in the annual promotion exercises being carried out by the Federal Civil Service Commission (Federal Government of Nigeria, 2000; Federal Government of Nigeria, 2023).

2.4 The APER FORM

Apart from the variations between the senior and junior cadre, every category of public servants fills the APER form whether they are technical or administrative staff. The yearly APER is divided into five sections. The first part contains employee's personal record and leave records; part two contains tasks and targets set, job description, key achievements, training/course attended in the year under review and job performance; in this part the employee fills his tasks and targets based on his job description for the year to measure whether he has performed to expectation. The third part evaluates character traits, assessment of performance by superior, work ethics, leadership qualities, training needs and teamwork; the fourth parts specifies following year's tasks and targets, comments by the

employee on the assessment, declaration/signature by the employee and the reporting officer; the last part is the counter signing officer's report, who is usually the immediate superior of the reporting officer. The countersigning officer makes the process more transparent and creates room for feedback mechanism and monitoring which can control supervisors and reviewers from being subjective to some extent (UK Essays, 2018).

2.5Theoretical Framework

The study is anchored on **Expectancy Theory.** The theory provides a robust foundation for explaining how performance appraisal systems influence employee behaviour, motivation, and performance outcomes in public sector organizations.

The theory posits that employees are more likely to exert effort when they believe that their actions will lead to good performance (expectancy), that good performance will be recognized and rewarded (instrumentality), and that the rewards offered are personally valuable (valence) (Kanfer*et al.,* 2022; Latham &Pinder, 2021). Vroom developed his expectancy theory to address previous motivational theories limitations and provide a more comprehensive understanding of employee motivation. He aimed to explain how individuals make choice regarding their behavior in the workplace bases on their expectations and perceived outcomes. The basic tenets of this theory are highlighted below.

1. **Expectancy:** individuals assess the relationship between their efforts and performance, determining if increased effort will lead better performance.
2. **Instrumentality:** individuals evaluate whether their performance will result in desired outcomes or rewards.
3. **Valence:** individuals consider the value or desirability they attach to the expected outcomes or rewards.

Vroom's theory of expectancy has had a significant impact on the field of organizational behaviour and management. It provides a framework for understanding and predicting employee motivation, decision making, and job satisfaction. The theory recognizes that employees are rational beings who weight the potential outcomes of their actions and make choices accordingly. By considering individuals' expectations and perceived outcomes, organizations design motivational systems aligning with employees' goals and increasing performances and satisfaction. Vrooms theory has proved to be relevant in leadership development, performance management, team dynamics and recruitment and selection in organization in the following ways.

Leadership Development: Leaders can use this theory to effectively motivate and reward their team members, considering their expectations and valence for different outcomes.

Performance Management: The theory provides a basis for establishing clear performance expectations and linking rewards to performance outcomes.

Team Dynamics: By recognized individual differences in expectancies, instrumentality, and valence within teams, organizations can foster collaboration, goals setting, and effective performance

Recruitment and Selection: Understanding expectancies instrumentality and valance can aid in assessing candidates' motivation and potential fit within the organization.

Application of the theory: In the context of Nigeria's public service, the Annual Performance Evaluation Report (APER) can act as a critical motivational tool when employees perceive a clear and credible linkage between their performance ratings and desirable outcomes such as promotions, training opportunities, recognition, or career progression. When APER assessments are timely, transparent, and accurately reflect employee contributions, they strengthen employees' belief that sustained effort will yield meaningful rewards, thereby enhancing performance motivation (Ejumudo, 2023; Okon&Oboh, 2022). However, when these expectancy conditions are weak such as when performance assessments are perceived as bureaucratic formalities, delayed, or disconnected from tangible rewards employee motivation tends to decline. This has been a recurring challenge in

Nigeria's public sector, where performance evaluation processes are often criticized for limited meritocracy and weak reward-performance alignment (Ateke&Nwokah, 2024; Ejumudo, 2023). Employees who perceive APER ratings as arbitrary or predetermined may engage in only minimal compliance behaviors rather than high-performance efforts.

However, the effectiveness of APER depends heavily on implementation quality rather than its mere existence. If performance indicators are vague, outdated, or framed in bureaucratic language, they tend to produce weak goal alignment and low motivational impact (Agbo*et al.,* 2024). In such cases, employees may complete appraisal forms perfunctorily without genuinely aligning their activities to strategic objectives. Studies of Nigerian federal ministries and agencies have shown that many public servants perceive APER as a ritualistic exercise rather than a performance management tool, largely due to poorly defined performance criteria and limited feedback (Eze&Uche, 2023; Akinbode&Shonuga, 2024).

3.0 Method of Research

The research adopted an ex post facto research design. This was necessary because the data for the study were obtained mainly from secondary sources. Thus, the study adopted a qualitative research based assessment of extant literature to explain the variables of the study. The literature collected from a relevant textbooks, journal articles, official documents such as the Nigerian Constitution, public service manual and other government publications etc. were evaluated with content analysis. Also, the study engaged in analysis of the APER forms, and outcomes of unstructured interview conducted with officials of some public servants in some agencies in Nigeria.

4.0 Discussion

41. What are the Challenges of the APER System?

A number of challenges to APER system undermine its effective implementation. These include lack of training and resources (Anyin and Anam, 2025), subjectivity and lack of transparency (Adeyemo and Adeyemo, 2019). Furthermore, there are also, the challenges of bureaucratic inefficiency, politicisation of appraisals, unclear performance indicators, weak feedback mechanisms, and a lack of alignment between appraisals and career progression or institutional learning (Ogunyemi&Ojo, 2022; Oladipo&Adewale, 2021). In most cases, performance evaluations are treated as procedural formalities, with limited impact on employee motivation or organisational outcomes. More so, the centralised, hierarchical nature of the Nigerian civil service further constrains participatory planning and innovation, these reduce the effectiveness of appraisal systems as tools for policy implementation and reform (Ayin&Anam, 2025). Besides, the public service structure is skewed at the top, leaving few vacancies for competition during promotion. This is coupled with intervening variables such as corruption, political interference by political office holders, neglect of the provision of laws and the public service rules, nepotism and other consideration such as the federal character principle as enshrined the 1999 constitution's fundamental principles of the state policy. For these reasons, the APER has been reduced to playing a secondary role in the promotion of the civil servant. Murphy (2004) observed that some of the challenges presently confronting the APER assessment system include embedded organizational civilization, lack of participatory mechanism leading to ill-defined occupation description, unequal preparation, discontinuous assessment procedure, and deficiency of committedness to employee development. Organisationalcivilisation in particular has a deep impact on employee's public presentation which can be either positive or negative depending on the norms and values of the organisation (Murphy, 2004).

Noe, Hollenbeck, Gerhart and Wright (2004), stressed on some of the indices of APER subjectivity which some major errors, such as halo or horn effects, leniency or strictness, central tendency, race, age and gender biases. According to the above scholars, halo effect reflects the tendency of the supervisor to unduly give high score to subordinate

while the horn effect which is opposite of the halo effect is a rating error that occurs when the rater responds to one negative aspect by rating the employee low in other aspects. The leniency error is another appraisal error where the supervisors have the tendency to rate subordinates higher and in strictness error, the supervisors may be too harsh to rate virtually all the subordinates with very low rating. The central tendency error occurs when superiors evaluate all subordinates as average performers even if the actual performances of employees vary. Another issue is rating bias due to gender. Studies have shown that men seem to receive higher ratings compared to women, given the same performance levels (Bauer &Baltes, 2002). In subjective performance evaluations, women are expected to receive more favourable ratings, as the probability of female evaluator increases (Maas & Torres-Gonzalez, 2010). Such appraisal errors are associated with reliability, validity and rating biases.

4.2 At what rate does the APER appraisal system undermine suitable job placement in the Nigerian public service?

Based on the analysis of available literature and unstructured interviews from the public service actors, it was reported that given the fact that the implementation of the APER presents features of being non-objective, unverifiable, paper-based and not inculcating attributes that are in line with global best practices, it follows that to a large extent, such system contributed in producing poor quality of officers over a period of time, particularly at the directorate/management level. Thus, with subjective considerations such as ethnic and federal character indices, public servants are often wrongly placed at positions they are not suited. This implies that service delivery is adversely affected while the public officer is unable to deliver on organizational mandates (Ayodele, 2023).

Without continuous/consistent of staff, job placement decisions are based on incomplete or outdated information which undermines proper placement of staff (Chioma, 2023); it follows that when scores are manipulated and does not reflect actual performance, it leads to unsuitable job placements, especially at senior cadres, where officers lack the requisite skills for the positions they are placed (Chioma, 2023).

4.3 How does the implementation of APER system undermine efficiency of employees in the Nigerian public service?

In APER regime, due to the fact that officers fill the forms themselves with no clear objectivity, in other words no real appraisal; secondly the forms are filled just once a year, whatever the public servant had done wrongly or rightly might not be recalled or might be missed (Chioma, 2020). So, it gave room for inefficiency since there is no proper scrutiny or the report does not represent the true performance of the public servant. More so, the APPER system does not ensure that every individual public servant, unit, department, and institution in the public service is held accountable, transparency and responsibility of actions are not fully operational (Chioma, 2020), hence, this creates room for laxity, and performance of the job with levity, thereby compromising efficiency in service. Besides, since APER does not link employee performance to national goals or departmental strategies, it creates misalignment which contributes to poor service delivery and inefficiency across agencies (Munezero, 2025).

4.4 How does the implementation of APER undermine proper promotion and retention in the Nigerian public service?

One disturbing aspect in the APER criteria for promotion with these rules is that there are no clear criteria or guidelines that allow the assessors to grade those they are assessing (Hall, 2003). For instance there are no clear cut criteria to ascertain what constitute good conduct and performance or which are acceptable qualifications by the government as professionals. In some occasions questions used for interviews and aptitude tests are prepared by the unqualified and unsuitable professional backgrounds. For instance, at times civil engineers prepare tests or examinations for electrical or mechanical engineers. Thus, there is absence of objectivity in the evaluation of the public servant

performance purposes of promotion. The APER system is replete with discrimination on the basis of professional and academic qualification; hence promotion examinations are set without stipulated standards. This explains why many ministries and departments have introduced conflicting guidelines which differ from the provision of the Civil Service Rules and the minimum standard in the grading and scoring of candidates (Anyin&Anam, 2025).

There are instances where available vacancies for positions and maturity of candidates to sit for promotion examinations are traded for ethnic sentiments (referred to as "let my people go". In fact, clerks are co-opted or any other randomly selected proxy to fill and endorse their APER forms which are used as the requisite assessment to participate in promotion examination. The above manipulation enables poorly performing officers to secure promotion. This explains why the written examination result published on 7th November, 2023, by the Office of the Head of the Civil Service of the Federation via a circular reference number HCSF/PS/CMO/178/VOL.11/85, was replete with over 70 % failure rate. The reason for this failure was because a different criterion other than the usual APER system of filling forms was used under the newly introduced Performance Management System (PMS). With the new system, the examination was made open to eligible Directors from states where vacancies exist. Thus, following the conclusion of the screening exercise, the result revealed that 61 of the 85 candidates who sat for the examination failed to meet the minimum mark of 50 per cent, which implies that only 20 candidates scaled through (Ayodele, 2023). This rate of failure in an objectively conducted examination is an indication that incompetent persons have often promoted in the past years via the APER system of filling forms.

4.5 To what extent has the implementation of APER undermine staff competencies and behaviours in the Nigerian public service?

Due to manipulations and lax implementation of APER over the years, it has contributed in producing public officers who lack the needed competence for effective public service delivery, thereby weakening institutional performance and public trust. No doubt, production of poor quality officers generates and as well recycle incompetence in the public service (Chioma, 2023). With this uncontrolled development, every ministry, department, extra-ministerial department forging ahead with new rules for promotion, assessment, relegating the civil service rule and rationality, then the APER and the civil servant may not be relevant in the promotion exercise. Ancillary services, such as, training assessment needs, productivity, succession plans, human resource needs and organisational diagnosis may no longer be possible through the use of APER (Anyin&Anam, 2025).

Despite APER's institutionalization, the appraisal of teamwork faces structural and cultural challenges in the Nigerian public service. A situation where there is prevalence of hierarchical decision-making, limited training opportunities, weak ICT infrastructure for collaboration, and managerial practices favouring seniority over collaborative merit often constrain effective teamwork (Ogebo&Sule, 2023) and competence. Empirical evidence underscores the role of supportive work settings in boosting performance. Zhenjing*et al.,* (2022) found that employees who experienced clear job roles, strong supervisory support, and adequate resources exhibited higher levels of productivity and job satisfaction. Similarly, Alqarni*et al.,* (2023) demonstrated that well-designed jobs that allow employees to develop their skills and take on meaningful responsibilities reduce turnover intentions and enhance contextual performance. Conversely, disengaged employees are more prone to presenteeism, turnover intentions, and reduced organizational citizenship behaviors (Knight *et al.,* 2023). Key drivers of engagement include meaningful work, recognition, and opportunities for professional growth, all of which stimulate motivation and, consequently, enhance performance (Deci & Ryan, 2020; Pomaranik*et al.,* 2024). So, effective on the job training which poor implementation of APER system does not emphasise often boost competence and positive behavior at work place, and absence of it produces incompetence and poor work ethics.

Overall, the effectiveness of the APER system in

Nigeria appears to be mixed. In spite of the perceived positive impact on employee performance, there are grave limitations in its implementation and calls for reforms to improve its effectiveness (Adeyemo&Adeyemo, 2019). The above gaps associated with APER system prompted Government institutions such as the Office of the Head of Service of the Federation, the Federal Civil Service Commission, and the Bureau of Public Service Reforms (BPSR) to consistently advocate for reforms that promote accountability, transparency, and efficiency in performance assessment (BPSR, 2024). Recent reforms reflect a policy shift toward digitalization and integration of performance data into decision-making. For example, between 2024 and 2025, the BPSR introduced a new Performance Management System (PMS), anchored on the balanced scorecard methodology, which will gradually replace or reform the APER in many ministries, departments, and agencies (MDAs) (The Cable, 2023; BPSR, 2024). This revised or "new APER" framework places emphasis on key performance indicators (KPIs) aligned with organizational mandates and individual job roles. Indicators typically assess productivity, quality of work, compliance with policy goals, and teamwork (Usman, 2025). The extent to which this new reforms under the PMS regime has addressed the challenges experienced under the APER system is subject to further studies.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The limitations of APER are particularly significant given that performance evaluation is critical for achieving organizational goals in the public service. Unlike modern appraisal frameworks that emphasize continuous feedback, measurable outcomes, and alignment between individual contributions and organizational objectives, APER lacks clear performance indicators linking effort to results (Anuma, 2023). Consequently, it neither fosters productivity nor supports the professional development of staff in response to evolving institutional needs (Argungu cited in Swiftreporters, 2024). Recognizing these challenges, the Federal Government has introduced reforms through the Performance Management System (PMS), a digital, KPI-based framework aimed at enhancing objectivity, accountability, and alignment with national strategic goals (Adeniyi, 2024; Akinyemi, 2023).

In such settings, appraisal systems like APER criticised for their generic design and lack of measurable benchmarks became inadequate for evaluating the specialised skills required. Ineffective performance evaluation compromised employee development, and organisational efficiency. It is therefore recommended that the new appraisal system referred to as the Performance Management System (PMS) introduced in 2022, by the Office of the Head of the Civil Service of the Federation to replace APER should indeed be strictly implemented in line with its objective of transforming how public servants are evaluated, which include to:

- Align ministries, departments, and agencies (MDAs) with national strategic plans;
- Set clear, measurable goals (SMART targets) for employees;
- Improve transparency, efficiency, and accountability.
- Reward high performers and support underperformers with development plans.
- Strengthen public trust by linking government performance to citizen impact

In essence, the PMS should not be allowed to be a flop like the APER that failed to encourage accountability and transparency in its operations,

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