

Workforce Training: A Tool to Boost Academic Performance of Selected Tertiary Institutions in Abia State

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Abstract

The study focused on workforce training: A tool to boost the academic performance of selected tertiary institutions in Abia State. The study sought to ascertain the impact of coaching and mentoring on academic performance in selected tertiary institutions in Abia State. The study adopted a survey research design. The study employed a primary source of data. The population consisted of 2934 employees from the academic staff of the selected tertiary institutions in Abia State. The sample size of the study was 352 which was determined with the Taro Yamane formula. 15 copies of the questionnaire were lost, while 337 copies were retrieved, that is, 95.8% which formed the basis for the study. The stratified Random Sampling technique was used for the study, while the regression model was used to test the selected hypotheses. The findings of the study revealed that there is a significant relationship between coaching and mentoring on the academic performance of selected tertiary institutions in Abia State, with $p\text{-value} = .004 < .05$ significance level. The study recommended that institutions under the study should make sure that they improve on mentoring through training, seminars and workshops, on-the-job mentoring and conferences or formal mentoring programmes across many disciplines where academic resources should be allocated to identify reality.

Keywords: Workforce training, coaching and mentoring, academic performance and tertiary Institutions.

Introduction

Workforce training is essential to the success of every organization. This means that without manpower, no establishment can function. Abiodun (2009) submitted that manpower training is a systematic development of the knowledge, skills and attitudes required by employees to develop skills and competence necessary to enhance bottom-line results for organizations. Every organization is established for a purpose. In the view of Chanokan (2008), workforce training refers broadly to the nature and direction of change induced in the employees as a result of education and training programmes. It looks in-depth at where an organization stands in comparison to where it hopes to be in the future and develops the skills and resources to get there. The ultimate goal of staff training and development is to enable the organization to grow stronger in achieving its purpose and mission. In the context of this study, workforce training seeks to improve the performance of work units, departments and the whole organization of

the Abia State Polytechnics Aba and Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike, Abia State.

The workforce is the basis of all resources and an indispensable means of converting other resources to mankind's use and benefits. So how well we develop and employ human resource skills is fundamental in deciding how much we will accomplish as a nation. The workforce is the pivot of every human institution. Even in the developed and industrial nations of the world where the use of machines and technology is at an advanced stage, manpower is still essential (Comma, 2008). Effective management is used to mean the training of a workforce to improve their application of knowledge, skill, behaviour or problem-solving techniques which they acquire through previous education, training and experience (Iwuoha, 2009). Hamlin (2004) examined the different views and definitions of workforce training and submits that it implies any activity which deliberately attempts to improve a person's skill in a job. It also creates learning in the areas of knowledge, skill, experience and attitudes. This tends to suggest that the essence of workforce training goes beyond job skills but extends to personal development in terms of knowledge acquisition. It can be interpreted to mean a transformation of men. Furthermore, Conroy (2010) defined workforce training as a purposive effort intended to strengthen the organisation's capability to fulfil its mission effectively and efficiently by encouraging and providing for the growth of its human resources. McNamara (2009) viewed training as involving an expert working with learners to transfer to them certain areas of knowledge or skills to improve in their current jobs.

Workforce training is not a responsibility of just an individual, rather it is a combination of different factors. Workforce training is a process that develops and improves skills related to performance. Training is simply a systematic process of changing the behaviour, knowledge and or motivation of employees in a direction to increase the effectiveness and academic performance of academic staff (Ajibua & Ayeni 2011). Training which is referred to as a course of diet and exercise for developing the employees' effective, cognitive and psychomotor skills assists the organizations to have a crucial method of developing the employee towards enhancing his productivity (Ezeani & Oladele, 2013). Its outcomes unfold through time, rather than immediately, and they tend to be long-lasting. Consequent to the above, this study attempts to evaluate workforce training as a tool for boosting the academic performance of selected tertiary institutions in Abia State.

Statement of the Problem

The importance of training has been recognized in many tertiary institutions as the key factor for improved performance. However, workforce training in the public sector is threatened by several problems including the absence of regular training despite the continuous reforms with emphasis on training. This is because the various reforms in the public sector have not considered it necessary to establish definite and continuous training programmes that will increase employees' productivity. This implies that when a training need is identified and resources, quality and time are committed to achieving the need, the training exercise can still be inadequate in addressing the productivity deficit. Sometimes, the training exercise is haphazard or lopsided in design, implementation and participation. At times, training is based on a faulty diagnosis of training needs. Again, there are instances where the tertiary institutions in Abia State do not recognize employees who have participated in training programmes to acquire additional skills and knowledge. Such recognition may come in the form of increased salary, promotion and other fringe benefits to reward their efforts. Sometimes, where training has occurred, management may not be willing to deploy such staff to other departments where they are relevant.

In situations where training occurs, the deployment of the staff so trained may be without regard to the skill the staff acquired, leading to frustration of the personnel so trained

and also general inefficiency in the system. The workforce is generally under-tapped, and under-utilized and therefore falls short of its anticipated contributions to the realization of organizational goals. It is appalling to note that the tertiary institutions in Abia State have paid little or no attention to staff training programmes, which often manifest tripartite problems of incompetence, inefficiency and ineffectiveness. Numerous scholars have been writing on how efficiency, competence and effectiveness can be achieved through training. It is against this backdrop that this study examined workforce training: A tool to boost the academic performance of selected tertiary institutions in Abia State.

Objectives of the Study

The general objective of the study is to examine workforce training as a tool to boost the academic performance of selected tertiary institutions in Abia State.

The specific objective is to ascertain the impact of coaching and mentoring on the academic performance of selected tertiary institutions in Abia State.

Research Question

The following research question will guide the study:

1. What is the impact of Coaching and mentoring on the academic performance of selected tertiary institutions in Abia State?

Research Hypotheses

The following hypothesis was formulated to be tested at a .05 level of significance:

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between coaching and mentoring on the academic performance of selected tertiary institutions in Abia State.

Literature Review

Concept of Workforce Training

Various factors such as capital, equipment, human resources etc., contribute to the success of any organization (including educational institutions).

The significance of these factors cannot be over-emphasized. The most important of these factors is the human factor since it is the people in the organizations that put the other resources to work. Therefore, to understand the concept of workforce training, it is important to understand the term “workforce” as it relates to this study.

Workforce refers to the total supply of personnel available or engaged for a specific job. It is also regarded as the most significant asset needed for the production of goods and services which is also the main instrument for promoting speedy national development and effectual service delivery. Workforces are men and women who constitute the total labour force of a nation and the ultimate basis for the wealth of nations. Therefore, the workforce is a useful element for coordinating other resources for national development. Organisations cannot accomplish their set objectives without manpower which is seen as labour force. Therefore, the workforce becomes an indispensable instrument for increased productivity in organisations.

Workforce training is an important idea usually used by different individuals. It has different meanings to different people. Some researchers see training as the impartation of ‘knowledge’, ‘enlightenment’ or ‘wisdom’ (Ofobruku & Nwakoby, 2015). This implies that these attributes underline workforce training as a vital ingredient of training, which equips the employee with the wherewithal for effective performance of duties and routine assignments. This impacts productivity and the realization of organisational objectives ultimately. Igbaekemen (2014) affirms that training is a process or strategy for upgrading and expanding the abilities, talents and knowledge of workers. As such, a fruitful training programme must add to the development and improvement of workers at all levels. Training influences the

workforce such that the workers' state of mind is improved to elicit their commitment to duties and organisational effectiveness.

Workforce training is not merely concerned with the worker's present activity, but prepares the worker for imminent work requirements (Kum, et al., 2014). Therefore, effective training programmes must be put in place to allow management to sustain a body of workers that could adequately substitute employees who may exit the organisation or who are redeployed to different departments. Hence, workforce training enables employees to adjust to advanced or modern-day technology and ensures that suitable workforces are made available for expansion into different and new areas. Abonyi (2007) further posits that training is regarded among the reliable strategies for workforce improvement. It implies the orientation of an employee to achieve the goals of the organisation, for realizing a maximum output and accomplishment of organisational aims and objectives. According to him, staff training aims to encourage workers to accumulate greater skills to operate at the most acceptable standard on the present job and to broaden their knowledge towards future opportunities in the organisation. This indicates that whatever the level of technological advancement of an establishment, the ideal efficiency and optimum productivity rest upon the expertise of the workforce.

Theoretical Review

Systems Theory Propounded by Eckstrand in 1982

The theory that is considered appropriate for this study is the Systems Theory propounded by Eckstrand in 1982. This study has adopted Eckstrand's system approach to training because the phenomena such as staff training and development are considered not only in terms of objectives parse but also in terms of the objectives and goals of the total organization or "system" in which the individual will be performing his task. An approach that conforms with the principle of the general Systems Theory which implies that one must be concerned with the objectives of a particular component within the system. Besides, Eckstrand's system approach to training enables the trainer to understand and keep in mind the different elements that constitute the total training process as he tries to accomplish his objectives by designing and executing training programmes that will boost staff performance towards achieving organizational objectives.

Put succinctly, the application of the systems theory to training and development programmes from Eckstrand's approach implies that the various elements that constitute the training process (such as training needs assessments which give rise to training objectives; training contents; training methods; training materials; the actual training activities and; training evaluations) should not only be harmonized with one another, but also be synchronized with the wider organizational objectives. This is instrumental to achieving the goals of training programmes, and that of the total organization as well. It is therefore logical to conclude that the systematic model of training and development is a sine qua non for effective training and development programmes in organizations. Training programmes have to assume a systematic pattern if such programmes are to equip their recipients (employees) with the necessary knowledge, skills, competencies and attitudes instrumental to performing their jobs effectively and efficiently.

Application of the Systems Theory Eckstrand in 1982

The systems theory is very apt in the explanation of the impact of training on the productivity of staff in the public sector using the Personnel Services Department of Abia State Polytechnic, Aba as a case study. Our topic discusses productivity which is a reflection of input-output analysis.

The systems theory believes that what goes in as input is influenced and shaped by the political system and sent out as output. One of the critical reasons for training in the public

sector is to adapt to innovations and changes in technology and work demand in general. However, these changes, innovations and technological requirements are mainly approved by the governments which are the decision-makers. It is important to mention that decisions made by the government whether in the local government, state parastatals or federal establishments are all affected by it.

One of the tenets of the systems theory is that it deals with organizational effectiveness and organizational survival. In the same vein tertiary institutions in Abia State are organizations in which Personnel Departments are the sub-systems within the supra system and so it strives to deliver services to its clients. The act of training staff is to improve their performance geared towards making them more effective and productive. However, when there is a training programme for the staff of an organization and adequate measures are taken to supervise the trainee, in the long run, there will be better productivity and the staff will experience job satisfaction.

Empirical Studies

Ugoji (2001) investigated the effect of training and development on organizational performance. The study used secondary data. Four hypotheses were developed to test the impact of all the independent variables on the overall organizational performance. The results showed that training and development, on-the-job training, training design and delivery style have a positive significant effect on organizational performance. He further presented a report on the impact of training (and vocational education) investments on company productivity and other performance indicators using a meta-analysis. The result showed that investment in training has a positive and significant impact on company performance indicators. This result confirmed the key role attributed to investment in skills in the European strategy for smart and sustainable growth, Europe 2020, and the initiative agenda for new skills and jobs. Therefore, he provided an advanced understanding of the effects of training on organizational-level outcomes by reviewing the results of previous studies that have investigated the relationship between training and human resources, performance, and financial outcomes. The results of a meta-analysis of 67 studies suggested that training is positively related to human resource outcomes and organizational performance but is only very weakly related to financial outcomes. Furthermore, training appears to be more strongly related to organizational outcomes when it is matched with key contextual factors such as organization capital intensity and business strategy. Further, training is related independently to organizational outcomes in support of the universalistic perspective of strategic human resource management rather than a configurational perspective.

Grant (2008) carried out a study on the impact of training and development on public sector organizations using the Ghana Ports and Harbors Authority (GPHA) as a case study. The study assessed the training and development process of GPHA, to test whether training improves employee performance. He designed a structured questionnaire to collect primary data from the employees of the GPHA. Personal interviews were also held with some management staff of the organization. The results indicated that GPHA's employees were not well informed about training and development programmes in the organization. Most of the employees were of the view that training and development were effective tools for both personal and organizational success.

Okeke (2011) studied the importance of manpower training and development in achieving operational efficiency in organizations. Most organizations especially small business organizations are not informed on the usefulness of retaining their staff. He therefore presented the need for methods, benefits and effects of manpower training and development on the operational efficiency of the organizations. Data was collected from secondary sources and through the analysis of related literature, and conclusions were drawn. Some useful

recommendations like organizations adopting general policies, and communicating and educating organizational members on the relevance of manpower training and developments were made.

Methodology

The study adopted the survey research design. A survey research design is one in which a group of people or items are studied by collecting and analyzing data from a few people considered a representative of the population using the questionnaire.

The study adopted primary data: The primary data is the original or first-hand information obtained by the researcher from the respondents directly for the study. To generate this data, the researcher made use of questionnaire and interviews.

The population of the study was drawn from the academic staff of Abia State Polytechnic, Aba and Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike, Abia State. Thus, the population consisted of a total of 2934 employees. The sampling technique that was used in the survey is the Stratified Random Sampling technique. The researcher after determining the sample size, distributed the questionnaires to 352 respondents. Thus, 352 copies of the questionnaire were administered to the academic staff of Abia State Polytechnic, Aba, Michael Okpara University Umudike, Abia State. However, 15 copies of the questionnaire were lost, while 337 copies were retrieved from the respondents, i.e. 95.8% retrieved, which formed the basis of this study. The study employed the 5-point Likert scale (5, 4, 3, 2,1) Strongly Agreed (SA), Agreed (A), Strongly Disagreed (SD), Disagreed (D) and Undecided (U).

Table 1: Ascertain the impact of coaching and mentoring on academic performance of selected tertiary institutions in Abia State.

Options	SA	A	UN	SD	D	MEAN	REMARKS
On-the job and team mentoring increases productivity of employees	169	95	15	-	28	3.0	Accepted
Off-the-job and multiple mentoring increase employees' commitment to his/her job	187	89	-	30	-	3.1	Accepted
Apprenticeship and electronic mentoring improves the confidence of the employees	178	96	-	-	-	2.7	Rejected
Workshops/seminars and needs driven mentoring improve the confidence of employees	211	121	-	10	10	3.5	Accepted
Orientation and creative mentoring improve communication between the employees and management	200	121	-	21	10	3.5	Accepted

Source: Field Survey, 2023

The table above ascertained the impact of coaching and mentoring on academic performance. Respondents with the highest mean scores of 3.5, 3.5, 3.1, 3.1 and 3.0 respectively accepted that workshops/seminars and needs-driven mentoring improve the confidence of employees, orientation and creative mentoring improve communication between the employees and management, off-the-job and multiple mentoring increase employees' commitment to their job, on-the-job and team mentoring increase the productivity of the employees.

Testing of Hypotheses

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between coaching and mentoring on academic performance of selected tertiary institutions in Abia State.

Table 2: Correlation coefficient between mentoring and employees' performance Correlations

		Coaching and Mentoring	academic Performance
Coaching and Mentoring	Pearson Correlation	1	.669
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.004
	N	337	337
academic Performance	Pearson Correlation	.669	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.004	
	N	337	337

Sources: Field Survey, 2023

The analysis of the table above shows the relationship between coaching and mentoring and the academic performance of selected tertiary institutions in Abia State $\rho = .669$ with P-value = $.004 < .05$ level significance. This shows that there is a 67% relationship between coaching and mentoring and academic performance. We therefore reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative hypothesis, which states that there is a significant relationship between coaching and mentoring and the academic performance of selected tertiary institutions in Abia State.

Summary of Findings

1. There is a significant relationship between coaching and mentoring and the academic performance of selected tertiary institutions in Abia State with p-value = $.004 < .05$ significance level.

Conclusion

It is an undisputed fact that effective workforce training is an investment in the employees of an organization, with both immediate and long-range returns. However, mere investment is not enough; organizations need to manage training programmes more effectively so that they can get the highest returns on their investments. The study found that there is a significant relationship between coaching and mentoring on the academic performance of selected tertiary institutions in Abia State. The ultimate aim of every coaching and training programme is to add value to employees. The study concluded that any workforce training and development programme that would not add value to the employees should be abandoned.

Recommendations

1. The institutions under study should conduct a training needs assessment programme to ensure that the right coaching is given to the employees; ensure that their coaching programmes are continuous; and motivate staff who perform exceptionally well during training sessions so that other staff can also aspire to excel.
2. The institutions under study should make sure that they improve mentoring through training, seminars, workshops, on-the-job mentoring and conferences or formal mentoring programmes across many disciplines where academic resources should be allocated to identify reality.

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