

Status of Core Competency Skills of Employees in Public Sectors of Ethiopia

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Abstract

The primary objective of this research is to assess the Core Competency Skills of employees within the public sectors of Ethiopia. The study employed a comprehensive approach, utilizing a descriptive survey and explanatory research design to gather and analyze data. Both primary and secondary data collection methods were employed, with primary data obtained through questionnaires and focus group discussions. A robust response rate of 98% was achieved from a sample size of 1600 randomly selected employees. The statistical analysis, conducted using SPSS version 25, unveiled those employees demonstrated moderate proficiency in essential areas such as customer service, communication, and teamwork. However, significant gaps were identified in fundamental competencies, particularly in decision-making and technology utilization. These findings underscore the pressing need for targeted training initiatives to enhance core competency skills and address skill deficiencies prevalent within the Ethiopian Public service sectors. To bolster competency levels and bridge skill gaps, it is recommended that organizations prioritize employee engagement, motivation, and the implementation of tailored training programs. Standardized assessments and clearly defined competency development goals should be established to promote staff proficiency and foster continuous competence enhancement within public sector entities. In conclusion, this study sheds light on the critical importance of investing in employee training and development to bolster core competency skills among public sector workers in Ethiopia. By implementing strategic interventions aimed at enhancing employee competencies, organizations can cultivate a more skilled and proficient workforce, ultimately driving improved performance and service delivery.

Keywords: Core Competency, Public Sector, Competency Skills

1. Introduction

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1.1 Background of the Study

The history of “modern” Civil Service in Ethiopia dates back to 1907 (Binyam & Elias, 2019). Since that time now, one hundred plus solid years had elapsed, nevertheless, despite this long experience of civil service, the in-efficiency and in-effectiveness of the sector continues to date. To curb such problems, different governments’ that comes to the scene takes various reform initiatives. However, the problem persisted for long and our Civil service still performs below the expected standard. Binyam and Elias, 2019 indicates the magnitude of the problem using short & meaningful phrase that “the Ethiopian civil service was plagued with a multitude of factors that hinders the effective delivery of services.” Few of these factors are; lack of neutral policy implementer, non-responsiveness to public interest, lack of transparency, and accountability, among others.

In consolidating the above argument, Meskerem, Fetiya and Selamawit, (2019), and Zerihuen & Tesfaye (2014); as cited in Binyam & Elias (2019) also confirmed the high-level inefficiency and ineffectiveness of the Ethiopian Civil Service. In this case being ineffective means not doing the appropriate task as per the expected standard; while being inefficient refers to doing the task incorrectly with maximum possible cost and wastage of resources.

In modern civil service, competent human power has taken as one of the key determinant factor for success and one of the critical problems that hamper the effectiveness of the Ethiopian Civil Service was employees’ low level of competence. Various research findings confirm this reality; nonetheless no research that explicitly showed the area and type of competencies that plays a determining role in improving employees’ competence and then organizational effectiveness and efficiency, in Ethiopia has done. Therefore, the question one can pose here is which area or types of competences are playing a crucial role in facilitating or de-facilitating the efficiency and effectiveness of the sector.

Recent studies on employees’ competences confirmed the prevalence of global skill shortage in general and mismatch between the competencies employees possessed and required for job position; either at job entry or continual period. It appears that employees’ current competencies are not aligned with the skill needs of the 21st century’s the sector demand; hence civil service institutions need to make diagnosis on the gaps so as to prescribe the right medicine that relive the patient (the Ethiopian civil service) from the illness. This may consequently help firms to identify and bridge the gap to improve workers employability competencies and productivity. Countries all over the world as well as organizations have made great effort to close such competency deficit and improve their government services by taking different initiatives.

In cognizant of the problem, the Ethiopian government has attempted to implement various reforms, ranging from the old Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) to the new Competency Based Human Resource Management, so as to improve the competencies of civil servants. However, research results revealed that these reform initiatives have not gained with the required results. Despite this fact the government effort continued. Especially the Civil Servants Proclamation No 1064/2017 clearly states the importance of installing competency framework to the Ethiopian Civil Servants. Following this, the Ethiopian Civil Service Commission has made

various efforts to formulate competency frameworks, which includes ‘core competency’ framework. The commission by now has identified 11 ‘core competencies’ that have clustered under three groups.

These competencies have a cross cutting nature and believed to complement formal education or organizational or industry knowledge that may be a prerequisite for job. This means, these core competencies readily work to all civil servants of the nation from top to down.

Nonetheless, ‘Competence’ and/or ‘competency’ are a multifaceted, multilevel and ambiguous terms that needs to be re-defined and re-conceptualized in the current Ethiopian context. To this end, the civil servants proclamation No 1064/2017, which serves as a policy document that gives an overall direction to the works of the national civil service in Ethiopia couldn’t explicitly define it. Therefore, at this very time finding meaning for the term ‘competence’ from the context of the Ethiopian civil service and reach in to consensus may be some how difficult.

In connection to the aforementioned problem, Ronald Zemeke, (1982); cited in R. Palanjappan, (2003) comments on the confusion these terms create and called them, ‘Humpty Dumpty Words’; meaning only what the definer wants them to mean. In supporting this idea, Mulenga & Kabombwe, (2019), stated that these two terms are sometimes confused & misused in the literature. Literally, ‘competency’ refers to the specific ability or skill of the person; while ‘competence’ is the ability to do something well. However, Kouwenhoven (2009) conceptualize these two terms as; “competency is the capability to choose and use (apply) an integrated combination of knowledge, skill and attitudes with the intention to realize a task; whereas competence is the capacity to realize the key occupational tasks that characterize a profession.”

In conferring to the above idea, Armstrong (2005) as cited in Mulenga and Kabombwe (2019), briefly explained that whilst competency is a person related concept, competence is a work-related concept. Likewise, to Zemeke, (1982) competency refers to a description of behavior that implies what people are and can do, not what they do; whereas competence is a description of work tasks or job out-puts the job holders need to do, what they need to know and how best to achieve standards that are nationally recognized. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine the status of Ethiopian Civil Servants towards the nationally identified eleven core competencies.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The concept 21stCentury skills have no single set of exhaustive meaning and list. However, the major essence of it is giving due emphasis on what employees’ do or perform with knowledge they possess from their education and day to day life experience than what portion of knowledge they cover during schooling. In this respect, the core competencies intended to convey the idea that changes in technology and culture are leading to changing demands in the work place and so the competencies that are required in today’s and the future workplace are different from those required in the past (Autor, Levy, & Murnane; 2003; Levy & Murnane, 2004; cited in Patrick C., 2012)

OECD, 2016, infer these competencies as ‘the right skills mix not only for the present but also for the future needs of dynamic labor markets and transferable, non-discipline specific skills as employee may achieve through learning that have application study, work and life contexts. This idea is also supported and (Gurvinder, 2008; cited in Sherer and Eadie, 1987), stated that core competencies skills are not job specific, but are skills which cut horizontally across all industries and vertically across all jobs from entry level to chief executive officer. Hence, these competencies are horizontally and vertically cross cutting and they are different from academic qualification, certification and experience.

Moreover, core competencies or soft skills are taken as indicative of employee potential both in terms of job performance and career advancement and this may show their key role to improve organizational objectives as well as improvement of individual performer capacity. This means, these skills have a dual & sustainable individual and organizational effects. That is why, Joll and et al., 2012, and Caballero and Walker, 2010 argued that these core competencies are a complex of generic attributes that allow employees to apply their technical knowledge to problem-identification and problem solving. This implies the futuristic and potential values of these competencies to employees’ productivity.

In consolidating the above notion, a number of studies made on the issue asserted that the current job world is highly globalized, dynamic and full of uncertainty and a number of new jobs are either created or becomes obsolete, combined or splintered into various job types. Thus, since the current world of job has such features; competencies employees’ bring from their schooling may not serve them for long, unless the incumbent has empowered with the required core competencies.

These competencies are helpful for employees to communicate easily for result, to work in collaboration with others, to think critically and creatively so as to solve current & future anticipated problems and to get acquainted with technology for the successful accomplishment of jobs. When employees empowered with these competencies they become lifelong learners who always strive to learn to climb the hill.

Nonetheless, a study made in Malaysia came with a finding that most of the employees possess excellent technical (core) or academic skills; while they are poor in mostly overlooked soft or core skills. These core competencies include communication, collaborative, creative, and critical thinking skills, among others. (Job Street, 2017). Similarly, to Scott, 2015; Partnership for 21st century, 2014; Teh, 2010; Kamarudin, 2015, the following are some of the skills and competencies that workers of the core competencies need to acquire to be successful at the workplace. These are the ability to communicate effectively, think critically, solve problems, work collaboratively, engage in lifelong learning and innovate. A study made by Bermuda College; cited Partnership for core competencies 2013, listed critical thinking, problem solving, communication, technical literacy, social & cross-cultural awareness and collaboration, among others as core competencies. (List of 21st century competencies)

Nevertheless, despite the fact that many of the contemporary literatures on the issue have supported the inclusion of 21st century skills to improve employees’ performance; this

conception is not free from critics. Opponents of this approach, such as (Silva, 2009) come with counter arguments against these 21st century competencies or skills. They leveled the term '21st century skills' as 'meaning less' and distraction from the more important work related or core competencies of employees'. The major limitations, as to these scholars are, core competencies are related to measurement problems; being 'vague and confusing' of the term; and the multiple descriptors given to it, among others. The opponents concluded that "emphasizing 21st century skills will water down standards..." and they recommend the way out of this problem is the amalgamation or integration of skills and content than propagating solely for skills. This critic has not easily thrown away; because beyond wishing civil servants to possess with this core competencies, thinking over how we organize these skills, empower practitioners, deliver and assess trainings in such a way that promote these skills is essential. Despite their opposition these scholars have not undervalued the importance of these skills.

Unfortunately no research (at least as to the knowledge of these researchers) had conducted in Ethiopia, on this specific issue yet; however findings from previous researches in Africa on employees' core competencies from the demand side have come with results. For example, in a study made in South Africa; Benson, Morgan and Fillipaios (2013); cited in P Jonck & F van der Walt (2015) argued that social skills and inherent personality traits are deemed as more important than technical skills or a degree qualification. As to this study, employees' core competencies contribute more than their qualification and experience. Based on this assertion, Asuquo and Inaja (2013); cited in (op cit. 2013) listed the following as the most important qualities that core competencies employees should possess: continuous learning, networking, team work, persistence, and organizational skills, among others.

Likewise, Freire, Alvares and Montez (2011); cited in P Jonck and F vander Walt (2015) also mentioned other most valued competencies needed for work performance in core competencies and these are; communication, leadership, customer service, understanding, and emotional intelligence. Therefore, we can conclude from the aforementioned arguments that most authors agree that competencies other than subject content knowledge mastery which certified by HEIs are essential for the core competencies.

Few research findings made on Ethiopian civil service organizations identified a number of challenges that faced the civil service. However; their major conclusion revolves around the systemic problem which results for ineffectiveness and inefficiency of the civil service. One among other frequently mentioned problem was 'low level of employee competence'. Nevertheless, it is a blanket conclusion that doesn't give clear answers for the type and magnitude of deficiencies our employees' lack. In other words, no explicit study had made on the status of employees core competencies in Ethiopia. Consequently, an absence of research on core competencies may; either hinders us to know and fill the gap and make civil servants in Ethiopia ineffective and inefficient when compared with other countries civil servants in the time of globalization. However, following proclamation 1064/2021, the Ethiopian civil Services Commission has established a project office and in collaboration with the Ethiopian Civil Service University, works hard to formulate a competency framework to civil servants.

The initiative, currently reached at the stage of identifying 11 core competencies that has believed to be important in the Ethiopian civil service sector. The identified ‘core competencies’ have resemblance as well as differences with other nation civil servants and other organizations core competencies. Following this the intention of the commission (as per the proclamation) is to introduce these core competencies to civil servants and check whether (both old and newly recruited civil servants) have acquainted with them during recruitment and thereafter through assessment.

However, besides identifying the 11 core competencies and made preparation to check the presence or absence of the skills in the employees and fill them consequently; employee’s current status towards these core competencies is not researched yet. Doing this may help the commission and capacity building agencies to know the status of employees towards these competencies and make the required effort to back up the drifts and consolidate those skills already possessed by employees.

In general, these competencies are helpful for employees to communicate easily for result, to work in collaboration with others, to think critically and creatively so as to solve current & future anticipated problems and to get acquainted with technology for the successful accomplishment of jobs. When employees empowered with these core competencies they become lifelong learners who always strive to learn to climb the hill.

In this study, therefore the eleven core competencies identified by the FDRE, Civil Service Commission will be examined. The Ethiopian Civil Service Commission, Core competency package (ECSC, 2021) identifies 11 (eleven) core competencies that are clustered in to three major groups. ‘Good personality’, consists of 3 sub categories: Emotional Intelligence, Commitment, and Customer Focused Service Delivery. The second cluster is named ‘Cooperation and Coordination’, which consists of 2 sub divisions; namely: Communication skill, Team work and Partnership. The third cluster is named ‘Working to attain organizational objectives’. It has five sub-components: Achieving result, Strategic thinking, Decision making, Entrepreneurship and reform, and Utilization of technology. The following research hypotheses guide this research study: 1) Employee commitment has a significant effect on employees' core competency development; 2) Organizational leaders’ commitment has a significant effect on employees' core competencies; 3) The motivation level of the organization's goals has a significant effect on employees' core competency development; 4) The provision of training by organizations has a significant effect on employees' core competency development; 5) Clearly stated goals of the organization have a significant effect on employees' core competency development; 7) The clarity of organization standards has a significant effect on employees' core competency development; and 8) The incentive system of the organization has a significant effect on employees' core competency development.

1.3 Significance of the Study

The final result of the study will make policy makers, government officials, and education and training institutions aware about the importance of the core competencies to the civil service employees of the Ethiopia. It also aimed to provide civil servants an eye opener, research backed information on the future of the job world and get prepared for that. Finally, this study may add knowledge to the literature core competencies of employees.

1.4 Scope of the Study

This study is delimited itself to employees of civil service Ethiopian organizations, who are employed based on the Federal Civil Servants Proclamation NO.1064/2017. The study also delimited to three regional states (Amahara, Somalia and Oromiya) and one city administration (Addis Ababa).

The Ethiopian Civil Service Commission, Core competency package (ECSC, 2021) identifies 11 (eleven) core competencies that are clustered in to three major groups. The first competency is Good personality which consists of 3 sub categories: Emotional intelligence, commitment, and customer focused service delivery. The second cluster is named cooperation and coordination, which consists of 2 sub divisions; namely: communication skill, team work and partnership. The third cluster is named working to attain organizational objectives. It has five sub-components: achieving result, think strategically, decision making, entrepreneurship and reform, and utilization of technology. In addition the study, will try to identify the external and internal factors that affects the core competencies of the civil servants in Ethiopian. Therefore, thematically this study will focus on the above listed core competencies of the ECSC and the internal and external factors affecting the core competencies. Finally, the study will be cross sectional in which the researchers will collect and analyze the data at a time.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Review of Related Literature

Competencies have a major role in augmenting integrated approach to Human Resource Management (HRM) to enable individuals to achieve desired proficiency within the organization. Investigation of effectual competencies usage can substantiate and reinforce many reforms being initiated among civil services. Sharma (2012) had suggested that the modern HR concepts, systems and practices have transformed into a different realm from the past. He further stated that there is a need to look at the competencies to provide organizations with a strategic competitive advantage. Inside civil services, literature proves move to competency oriented epoch in HR management especially in performance appraisal. Strategic advantage for civil service is always there in terms of performance on their assigned role for the benefit of citizens and governments. Therefore, competencies have become main precept of job profiles to nurture and manage performance of civil services. Butler & Fleming (2002) have analyzed competency framework in Ireland and suggested that efficacy of competencies gets optimized through synergy and combination of competency-based PA approaches with various HRM functions like employee resourcing and progress.

Recognition, applicability and use of such framework in performance appraisal comprehensively promote a wide range of HR practices for productivity. This paper aims to explore literature and inputs from the officers about an effective use of competencies for Indian. Here the competency-based electronic performance appraisal approach is associated with accrued advantages to government, society and civil servants.

2.2.1 Concepts and meanings of core competencies.

Competency is defined as a behavioral trait related to a particular body of knowledge and skills for effective job performance (Vathanophas & Thai-ngam, 2006). A competency is a cluster of observable, measurable, and highly interrelated attributes, including knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) that give rise to the behaviors needed to perform a given job effectively to contribute to organizational success. Competencies can be technical or behavioral. Technical competencies reflect the knowledge required to perform a specific role. Behavioral competencies describe the KSAs that facilitate the application of technical knowledge to job-related behavior. In other words, technical competencies reflect the knowledge that HR professionals apply to their jobs while behavioral competencies reflect on how they apply this knowledge (Dasho Karma Tshiteem, 2019).

2.2.2. Importance of Core Competencies to Civil Servants

For a long time, the competency concept has been around in public administration as shown by Hood and Lodge (2004). Until, say the mid-1950s, the term ‘competency’ was however exclusively understood as technical competency, that is, the ‘subject expertise and technical skills’ of individual civil servants (Hood and Lodge 2004, 781). It was not only nineteenth century Germany in which technical competency was deemed necessary to run government bureaucracy more efficiently as stated by Hood and Lodge (2004), but also, among others, the Chinese emperors (Bowman 1989), the Roman administrators (Jones 1949), and the Ottoman sultans (Quataert 2005) used technical competency as criterion for recruiting, selecting, and promoting civil servants.

From the 1950s onwards, Hood and Lodge (2004) identified at least three different meanings of the competency concept which, although developed in the business world, were sooner or later incorporated in the field of public administration (cf. Horton, 2002). First, competencies can be seen as ‘behavioral traits associated with excellence’ (Hood and Lodge 2004, 781). The origin of this meaning can be traced back to the work of McClelland (1973). McClelland argued that the Western education system had to be less preoccupied with assessing (and training) intellectual capacities, but had to focus more on assessing (and training) key traits that students need in real life, that is, their actual work.

It was later added to McClelland’s school of thought by Boyatzis (1982) that these key traits – competencies – had to be understood as traits that differentiate excellent from average performers (cf. Boyatzis 2008). Applications of this approach in public administration can be found for example in Gertha-Taylor (2008) who tried to identify critical collaborative skills for

civil servants, which were defined as ‘... differentiating competencies, or those competencies that distinguish superior performers from average performers’ (2008, 105, emphasis in original). In the 1980s, the competency concept was also introduced in the strategic management literature (Prahalad and Hamel 1990). In this field, the term was ‘transposed’ from the individual level to the level of the organization (Hood and Lodge 2004). It is believed that organizations need to identify those capacities that they consider their main assets which, moreover, cannot be easily copied by other organizations. If nurtured correctly, these key capacities – dubbed ‘core competencies’ – were believed to result in a strong competitive advantage. Proponents of the ‘core competency school of thought’ encourage organizations to strengthen their core competencies further to remain ahead of the competitors. Originally, the literature on core competencies focused on private-sector organizations, but various authors tried to apply this line of thinking to public organizations too (e.g. Moore 1995).

In the 1980s, a humbler meaning of the competency concept was (re-)introduced. Instead of exclusively considering competencies as those abilities that distinguish excellent from average performers, competencies were in this stream of research defined as ‘minimum abilities required tackling specified jobs’ (Hood and Lodge 2004, 781). Various public administration scholars, often implicitly, follow this humble meaning of the competency concept too. For example, Kruyen and Van Genugten (2017) investigated to what degree civil servants need to be creative in their work without assuming that excellent civil servants are by definition creative employees. In this article too, we follow the humbler meaning of the competency concept. Specifically, we define competencies broadly as work-related skills, abilities, and attitudes that civil servants need to apply to perform their job effectively (cf. Hirsh and Stable, 1995 in Horton 2002, 4). In this study, we aim to explore which competencies civil servants themselves consider important to enhance task performance.

2.2.3. Challenges for Equipping the Core Competencies

Many of today’s organizations can be characterized as distributed, matrix, and global, with functions that often operate autonomously in the absence of governance. These factors make efficient and effective identification, utilization, and implementation of competencies difficult. In fact, 69 percent of organizations surveyed said their competency management was only somewhat, or not at all, effective. Interviews and focus groups with executives and other business and HR leaders exposed six competency challenges prevalent in many organizations. It is believed that Competency management is treated as an HR process, rather than a business imperative.

On average, 88 percent of organizations identified better leader and employee performance as important or critical to the business. When asked about the single most important call to action to improve performance, interviewees said, “Tell employees what is expected of them to excel.” Performance excellence, then, means clear communication of the competencies for which an employee is accountable. But in our 2015 State of Leadership Development Study, 31 percent of organizations said they had not defined their critical leader competencies, much less any of the

others (core, functional, or career). Until competency management is revered as the business imperative it is, performance will continue to languish.

Without an assessment strategy (15 percent) and the ability to predict the skills needed by the business going forward, organizations are left clueless as to what skills exist and are needed. Some 74 percent of organizations say that definition of essential competencies by talent segment and job role is critical, or important, to the business. Yet, a stark .7 percent of organizations have the means to predict the essential skills required.

Some 61 percent of organizations have only somewhat effectively, or not at all, identified critical talent segments and key job roles. Hence, it goes without saying that most have yet to define critical job responsibilities and success criteria. In the absence of these competency procedures, it is no surprise that 72 percent of organizations indicate that employee and leader skill building is only somewhat, or not at all, focused on developing competencies requisite for achieving business goals. For the first time ever, an organization's people strategy supersedes the organization's business strategy, in regard to its importance in meeting business goals.

2.2 Empirical Review of Related Literature

According to research by Kim and Jung (2022), human resource professionals should situationally match company culture and personnel competency to lower employee stress. The authors suggest that firms should cultivate a clan organizational culture if they wish their staff to possess adaptation competencies (a professional competency). Organizations, on the other hand, should promote a market organizational culture for their personnel who have a proficiency in consumer orientation (simply a result-oriented ability). The study's findings add to the body of literature, deepen academics' grasp of the subject matter, and provide a significant knowledge base for upcoming empirical studies. In addition, the study conducted by Keerthy and Biyu (2018) showed that improving work competence can significantly improve employee performance.

The assessment of employees' core competency skills in the public sector is a fundamental step in understanding the current skill levels of the workforce, identifying strengths and areas for improvement, and designing targeted training programs to enhance employee performance and organizational effectiveness. This process plays a crucial role in ensuring that employees have the necessary competencies to meet the demands of their roles and contribute positively to the achievement of organizational goals (Alemu & Mekonnen, 2020).

Ethiopian public sector professionals face both opportunities and problems in improving core competency abilities, according to research by Tadesse et al. (2019). Opportunities include focused training programs and performance management initiatives, whereas difficulties include organizational culture, leadership support, and resource limitations.

Girma and Abebe (2018) posit that a multitude of factors impact Ethiopian public sector personnel' acquisition of core competency skills. These elements consist of systems for performance management, job design, employee motivation, and organizational policies. In order to create an atmosphere that is favorable for skill development, these variables must be addressed.

Training programs are important in helping public sector professionals improve their core competency skills, as Abate et al. (2021) mentioned. Employees participating in effective training programs might gain new skills, perform better, and advance company objectives. Putting money into focused training initiatives is essential to developing a competent workforce in the public sector.

One of the most important steps in determining the workforce's strengths and opportunities for development is evaluating the core competence skills of employees in the public sector. Alemu and Mekonnen (2020) stress the significance of this evaluation since it gives businesses insightful information about the skill levels of their workforce, allowing them to create customized training plans that cater to particular needs.

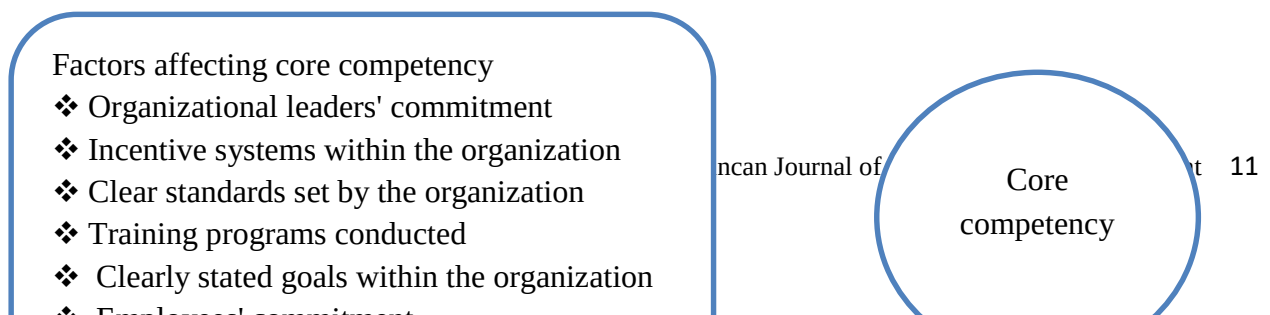
Organizations can obtain a full grasp of the talents and abilities of their personnel by carrying out an extensive evaluation of core competence skills. Employees' knowledge, skills, talents, and behaviors pertinent to their employment tasks and obligations in the public sector are assessed as part of this evaluation. Effective competence assessment, according to research by Gao, Janssen, and Johnston (2017), aids organizations in identifying the skills shortages in the workforce so that training programs can be customized to close these gaps and improve overall performance.

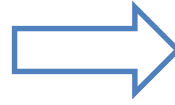
Organizations can determine an employee's strengths and weaknesses in core competency abilities by using this evaluation technique. Organizations can use individuals' strengths by knowing them and assigning projects that complement their areas of competence. However, by pinpointing areas that need work, organizations may create customized training plans that close certain skill gaps and improve productivity. The significance of ongoing competency assessments in the public sector is underscored by research conducted by Farazmand (2018), which guarantees that staff members can adjust to evolving work specifications and organizational demands.

Additionally, organizations can better connect their training and development programs with strategic goals and objectives by evaluating employees' core competence skills. Organizations may guarantee that employees learn the skills and abilities needed to fulfill organizational goals and effectively contribute to achieving targeted outcomes by customizing training programs based on assessment results. O'Toole and Meier's (2017) study found that when training programs are in line with organizational objectives, employee motivation and engagement rise, which enhances output and job satisfaction.

2.3 Conceptual Framework of the Study

The independent variables which include leadership commitment, incentive structures, clearly defined standards, training program conducted, articulated goals, employee commitment, and motivation whereas the status of competency is dependent variable.





Source: The researchers own source from various literature (June, 2022)

3. Research Methods

3.1 Introduction

This part of the article focused on the methodology employed for the study, including research design, study area, target population, sampling procedures, data collection instruments, data analysis, and ethical considerations.

3.2 Research Design and Approach

The research utilized a combination of descriptive survey and explanatory research design. Descriptive design was selected to collect data from a wide population through the use of questionnaires. Meanwhile, explanatory design was employed to investigate the impact of various factors on the competency performance of employees in the sampled organizations. The study followed a mixed research approach, specifically employing a concurrent explanatory research design. Both primary and secondary data sources were utilized to gather the necessary information to meet the research objectives. The respondents of the study included public service employees who held at least a first-degree qualification. In addition to quantitative data, qualitative data was also obtained through focus group discussions to substantiate the quantitative with qualitative.

3.3 Target Population, Sample Size and Sampling techniques

The study primarily focused on the Civil Service Organization of Ethiopia, specifically emphasizing the permanent government employees at bureaus and respective offices operating at various levels. Ethiopia comprises nine regional states (Oromia, Amhara, Tigray, SNNP, Harari, Benishangul, Gambella, Somali, and Afar), along with two city administrations (Addis Ababa and Dire Dawa). The regional states are categorized as either developed or emerging. The well-developed states include Oromia, Amhara, Tigray, SNNP, and Harari, while Benishangul, Gambella, Somali, and Afar are considered emerging regions. Tigray and Afar regions were in political instability and hence did not include in the study.

To get a sample, the study employed purposive sampling techniques in which the highest employees staffed region such as two developed regions (Oromia and Amhara) were selected. From the emerging region (Jijiga) and from the administrative cities of Addis Ababa city

administration was selected. The sample sizes for each regional state and city administration were determined using the maximum sample size needed for a particular population size and margin of error is provided by the Kerche and Morgan table. It is a statistical tool used in survey research to calculate the smallest sample size required to estimate population parameters with the appropriate degree of precision. The table indicates that the largest population's maximum sample size is 384, with a 95% margin of error. Because there are many employees in the regional state government bureaus, 384 samples from each region were taken into account, for a total of 1536 samples from the four regions.

There were twenty bureaus in each of the chosen regional states and city administrations. Using a lottery, a 20% sample was selected from these bureaus. According to Gay and Diehl (1992) as referenced in Hill (1998), a sample size of 10% or above is deemed sufficient for survey research.

Out of the 20 bureaus, five bureaus (the Revenue Bureau, Public Service and Human Resource Development, Finance, Trade and Industry, and Construction bureaus) were chosen through a lottery method from a total of 20 bureaus. Furthermore, proportionate stratified and systematic random sampling techniques were used to choose a sample of respondents from each bureau. Additionally, a purposeful sample strategy was used to carefully choose members for the focus group discussions.

3.4 Data collection Methods

The study utilized both questionnaire and focus groups discussion tools to gather information from the sampled population. The purpose of the questionnaire was to collect comprehensive data while maintaining objectivity. There were both open-ended and closed-ended items in it. To get more detailed insights, focus group discussions were also held. Pilot testing was done before the primary data collection to find any difficult or ambiguous items. Pilot test results included ambiguous statements in the questionnaire and improperly worded instructions that caused respondents to make mistakes. Before the questionnaire's final distribution, these issues were fixed. The Cronbach's alpha reliability test was used to assess the internal consistency of the items and all the items were found reliable. Moreover, experts in the field reviewed the items to evaluate their face validity.

3.5 Data Analysis Methods

The collected quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive statistics techniques, such as percentages and weighted mean. Additionally, ANOVA was employed to investigate if there were significant differences among regions regarding factors influencing employees' core competency. Multiple regression analysis was also conducted to examine the effects of core competency determinants on employees' core competency. Prior to applying multiple regressions, assumptions including linearity, normality, multicollinearity, and heteroscedasticity were examined.

Conversely, the qualitative data collected from focus group discussion underwent analysis through sorting, classifying, and arranging, with a particular emphasis on combining thematic

content analysis methods. The results derived from the quantitative data were presented visually using tables, graphs, charts, and percentages. Furthermore, the qualitative data served as a supportive component that provided additional evidence and substantiated the findings obtained from the quantitative analysis.

4. Results and Discussions

Before go through the analysis, the researchers compute the reliability test for each construct and the results for all are above the expected cut point (0.7) as seen in the Table 4.1 below.

Table 4.1 Reliability Test

Constructs	Reliability Statistics	
	Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
Customer focus	0.911	8
Communication	0.868	6
Team work	0.913	7
Achievement	0.909	5
Decision making	0.909	5
Utilization of technology	0.898	6
Factors affecting core competency	0.913	8

Source: survey data (2023)

4.1 Descriptive Analysis on Core Competencies of Employees

The data collected from 1269 respondents on dimensions of core competencies of employees (customer focus, communication, teamwork, goal achievement, and decision-making) and factors affecting core competencies of employees were processed, analyzed and discussed below by using Pihie and Akmaliah's (2009) mean cutting point to analyze the data. A mean score below 3.39 is deemed low; those between 3.40 and 3.79 are considered moderate; and those above 3.79 are considered high.

Table 4.3 Perception of respondents on customer focus competency

SN	Items	N	Mean	Std.
1	Your organization consider the customer's need in planning activities (CU1)	1269	3.48	1.169
2	Your organization set standards based on the needs of customers interests (CU2)	1269	3.54	1.137
3	Your organization perform its all activities based on interests of customers (CU3)	1269	3.36	1.198
4	Your organization use feedback from customers to improve its customer service delivery (CU4)	1269	3.42	1.197
5	Your organization provide service by taking concerns of their customers' needs seriously (CU5)	1269	3.44	1.15

6	Your organization is responsive for customers 'needs (CU6)	1269	3.53	1.169
7	Your organization provide tangible services which is related to customers' expectations (CU7)	1269	3.51	1.13
8	Your organization use proper complaint handling mechanism (CU8)	1269	3.47	1.139
	Cumulative mean		3.48	1.161

Source: Survey data (2023)

As a result, respondents in table 4.3 above rated moderate ($M = 3.48$, $Std = 1.169$) as their organization considers customer needs in planning. Besides, respondents replied moderate, as their organization sets standards based on the needs of customers' interests, as evidenced by $M = 3.54$ and $Std = 1.137$. Respondents also perceived low as their organization performed all activities based on the interests of customers, as exhibited by $M = 3.36$ and $Std = 1.198$. Employees replied moderately ($M = 3.42$, $Std = 1.197$) as the organization uses feedback from customers to improve its customer service delivery. Respondents replied moderately ($M = 3.44$, $Std = 1.150$) as their organization provides service by taking concerns about their customers' needs seriously.

Respondents in the same table above rated moderate because their organization is responsive to customer needs, as evidenced by a mean of 3.53 and a standard deviation of 1.169. In addition, respondents replied moderately that the organization provides tangible services that are related to customers' expectations, which are exhibited by a mean of 3.51 and $Std. 1.130$. Moreover, respondents rated moderate as organizations use proper complaint handling mechanisms, as evidenced by the mean of 3.47 and $Std. of 1.139$. The cumulative mean generally indicates that the selected organizations are customer focused to some extent.

As indicated in Table 4.4, respondents had moderate ratings for the statement "Employees of the organization are able to communicate their ideas in writing ($M = 3.51$; $Std = 1.161$). This implies that employees are communicating their thoughts in writing slightly. Besides, respondents had replied moderately, as employees of the organization are able to communicate their ideas orally, as evidenced by the mean of 3.51 and $Std 1.161$. Employees' ability to listen and comprehend ideas was rated moderately by respondents, with a mean of 3.65 and a standard deviation of 1.054 which implies that employees are able to listen and comprehend ideas to some extent.

Respondents also have moderate ratings on employees' ability to maintain direct contact with customers, as supported by mean ratings of 3.51 and 1.167. In addition, respondents perceived as employees of the organization are able to report information to supervisors and colleagues in a moderate ($M = 3.72$, $Std = 1.074$) way.

4.1.1 Communication

Table 4.4 Respondent's perception on communication competency

SN	Items	N	Mean	Std.
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1	Employees of the organization are able to communicate their ideas in writing	1269	3.51	1.161
2	Employees of the organization are able to communicate their ideas orally	1269	3.59	1.102
3	Employees of the organization are able to listen and comprehend ideas	1269	3.65	1.054
4	Employees of the organization are able to Maintains direct contact with customers	1269	3.51	1.167
5	Employees of the organization are able to reports information to supervisors and colleagues	1269	3.72	1.074
6	Employees of the organization are able to discuss with customers using arguments to exchange ideas.	1269	3.58	1.102
	Cumulative mean		3.59	

Source: Survey data (2023)

Furthermore, respondents had a moderate rating ($M = 3.58$, $Std = 1.02$) on employees' ability to discuss with customers by using arguments to exchange ideas. In general, the cumulative mean indicates that employees communicate with one another only slightly.

4.1.2 Team Work

Table 4.5 perceptions of employees on team work competency

SN	Items	N	Mean	Std.
1	Employees Share information openly among team members	1269	3.64	1.130
2	Employees participate in the development of team goals	1269	3.64	1.077
3	Employees Co-operates with team members to resolve problems.	1269	3.56	1.123
4	Employees are willing to take time to provide help to other members.	1269	3.55	1.062
5	Employees seek help from others in performing their activities	1269	3.57	1.094
6	Employees acknowledge other's skills, experience, knowledge, creativity and contributions.	1269	3.51	1.100
7	Team members address conflicts within the group.	1269	3.37	1.135
	Cumulative Mean		3.55	

Source: Survey data (2023)

Respondents rated moderately, as evidenced by mean ratings of 3.64 and 1.130 on employees sharing information among team members, as shown in Table 4.5. This reveals that employees share information openly with team members to some extent. Additionally, respondents are seen as employees who participate moderately ($M = 3.64$, $Std = 1.077$) to develop team goals. In addition, respondents had a moderate rating for the statement that employees cooperate with team members to resolve problems, as evidenced by a mean of 3.56 and a standard deviation of 1.123. This particular point sticks out as employees cooperate with team members to resolve problems somewhat. On the same table above, respondents gave a moderate rating ($M = 3.55$ and

Std. = 1.062) to employees' willingness to take time to provide help to other members. Besides, respondents replied moderately (M = 3.57, Std = 1.094) on employees need for help from others in performing their activities. This shows that employees seek slight help from others to accomplish their activities. Respondents also rated moderately on employees' acknowledgment of others' skills, experience,

Knowledge, creativity, and contributions, as evidenced by a mean of 3.57 and Std of 1.100. On the other hand, employees rated low (M = 3.37, Std = 1.135) for the statement 'Team members address conflicts within the group'. Moreover, the cumulative mean (M=3.55) revealed that employees have a moderate capability to engage in teamwork.

4.1.3 Achievement Results

Table 4.6 Perceptions of employees on Achievement of goals

Achievement Items	N	Mean	Std
Employees are committed to perform work	1253	3.65	1.075
Employees accomplishes tasks on time	1252	3.49	1.113
Employees measure their performance and check against with the organizational goals	1238	3.48	1.096
Employees measure their performance and check against with the organizational goals.	1244	3.44	1.132
Employees work by linking their daily activities with organizational goals	1235	3.40	1.128
Average Mean & Std.		3.49	1.1088

Source: Survey data (2023)

As a result, respondents in table 4.6 rated moderate (AM= 3.49, ASTD=1.1088) as their organization employees are committed to perform their work, accomplish their work on time, working to satisfy customers' need, and measure their performance and check against with the organizational goals towards organizational result achievement. This depicted that employees of the organization are not able to contribute their part towards organizational result achievement as expected. Moreover, the cumulative mean (M=3.49) revealed that employees have a moderate capability to contribute their part in the organizational achievement of result.

Table 4.7 Decision making

Decision Making items	N	Mean	Std.
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Employees take adequate alternatives to make decisions.	1248	3.27	1.095
Employees are able to make decisions with reasonable time.	1253	3.37	1.093
Employees take risks to make decisions that may yield significant results.	1247	3.33	1.108
Employees makes effective decisions autonomously	1249	3.28	1.107
Employees make proactive decisions	1247	3.34	1.139
Average Mean		3.31	1.1084

Source: survey data (2023)

As a result, respondents in table 4.7 rated low (AM= 3.31, ASTD=1.1084) as employees in their organization made decision by take adequate alternatives to make decisions, are able to make decisions with reasonable time, take risks to make decisions that may yield significant results, makes effective decisions autonomously and proactive decisions. Moreover, the cumulative mean (AM=3.31) revealed that employees have a low capability to decide in their day to day activities in the organization.

Table 4.8 Utilization of Technology

SN	Item	N	Mean	Std.
1	Employees have required skills of ICT for their assigned job.	1249	3.52	1.155
2	Employees have an ability to communicate ideas with the help of ICT	1250	3.55	1.109
3	Employees have positive attitude towards the use of technology.	1247	3.70	1.045
4	Employees use ICT to collect, store and retrieve information from the wider world of knowledge.	1251	3.54	1.103
5	Employees analyze various data and solve problems consistently with the help of ICT	1239	3.47	1.115
	Average mean & Std		3.55	1.1054

Source: survey data (2023)

As a result, respondents in table 4.8 rated moderate (AM= 3.35, ASTD=1.1054) as employees in their organization use technology for their job, to communicate with other others, to collect and sore information. Moreover, the cumulative mean (M=3.55) revealed that employees have a moderate usage of technology while performing their activities in the organization.

The determinants of employees' core competencies development in their individual firms were asked to be rated by the respondents. As shown in Table 4.9, employees were rated low on commitment of top-level managers (3.13), incentive systems to promote employees core competency (3.19), developing standards to evaluate employee's competency (3.22), providing training to fill competency gaps (3.23), clearly defined competency development goals (3.23), employee commitment to develop their competency (3.37), and employee motivated by organizational goals (3.37). The overall mean of the determinants of employees' core competency development (3.25) in their respective organizations revealed that the practice was found low. This implies that employees of the organizations were not satisfied with their

organization initiative to develop employees' core competency. This consequently results with lack of employees required skills to serve their respective organizational customers.

Table 4.9 Factors affecting employees core competency Development

SN	Items	N	Mean	Std.
1	Organizational leaders are committed in promoting employee's technical skill	1248	3.13	1.226
2	Your organization has incentive systems to promote employees core competency	1251	3.19	1.240
3	Your organization has clear standards to evaluate employee's competency	1252	3.22	1.179
4	Your organization conducts trainings to fill competency gaps of employees	1249	3.23	1.184
5	Your organization clearly stated goals to enhance the skill of employees	1253	3.23	1.151
6	Employees are committed to develop their competency.	1251	3.37	1.116
7	Employees are motivated by the goal of the organization	1254	3.37	1.151
	Mean		3.25	

Source: survey data (2023)

4.2 Regression Analysis

In addition to the descriptive analysis researchers had conducted an inferential analysis in order to evaluate the extent of influences of each factor on employees' core competency by using regression analysis. Before regression analysis all necessary assumptions for regression analysis (linearity, normality, multicollinearity, and Heteroskedasticity) were assured by the researchers.

Table 4.10 Test of model fitness (ANOVA Test)

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	434.535	7	62.076	269.068	.000 ^b
Residual	281.234	1219	0.231		
Total	715.769	1226			

Source: survey data (2023)

The significance level for the ANOVA test results was less than 0.05, as shown in Table 4.10. Therefore, it can be said that the model is appropriate for additional regression analysis.

Table 4.11 R-square results

R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
.779 ^a	0.607	0.605	0.480

The combined impacts of the predictor variables were responsible for 60.7% of the changes in the dependent variable. However, other variables were not examined in the study account for 39.3% of the variances.

The developed hypotheses are shown in Table 4.12 together with their unstandardized and standard coefficients, T-value outcomes, and level of significance difference. The variance of the dependent variable, which is governed by all other variables in the model, is best explained by the variable with the highest beta value. The beta column below the standard coefficient illustrates this. The most important variables influencing the development of employees' core competencies in the study area were employee commitment (0.302), organizational leaders' commitment (0.214), and motivation for the organization's goals (0.164), organization-provided training (0.139), and clearly stated organizational goals (0.127).

Table 4.12 Hypothesis testing

Formulated Hypothesis	Unstandardize d Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
	Beta	Std. Error	Beta		
Employee commitment has a significant effect on employees' core competency development.	0.206	0.017	0.302	12.35	000
Organizational leaders' commitment has a significant effect on employees' core competencies.	0.133	0.018	0.214	7.45	000
The motivation level of the organization's goals has a significant effect on employees' core competency development.	0.109	0.017	0.164	6.42	000
The provision of training by organizations has a significant effect on employees' core competency development.	0.09	0.019	0.139	4.74	000
Clearly stated goals of the organization have a significant effect on employees' core competency development.	0.084	0.02	0.127	4.28	000
The clarity of organization standards has a significant effect on employees' core competency development.	0.026	0.019	0.039	1.32	0.19
The incentive system of the organization has a significant effect on employees' core competency development.	-0.012	0.015	-0.02	-0.79	0.43
(Constant)	1.417	0.051		28	000

Source: survey data (2023)

4.3 Discussions

The study shows that the sampled organizations are strived to develop their plan based on their customers' needs and also set standards by considering their customers' interests to some extent. Organizations are responsive to their customers to some extent but underperform in providing tangible services related to customers' expectations even if there is a proper compliant handling mechanism. Thus, the selected organizations are customer focused to some extent. In addition, the qualitative data also support the quantitative results as there is a gap in fully considering their customer needs and expectations in all stage of organizational activities like in planning.

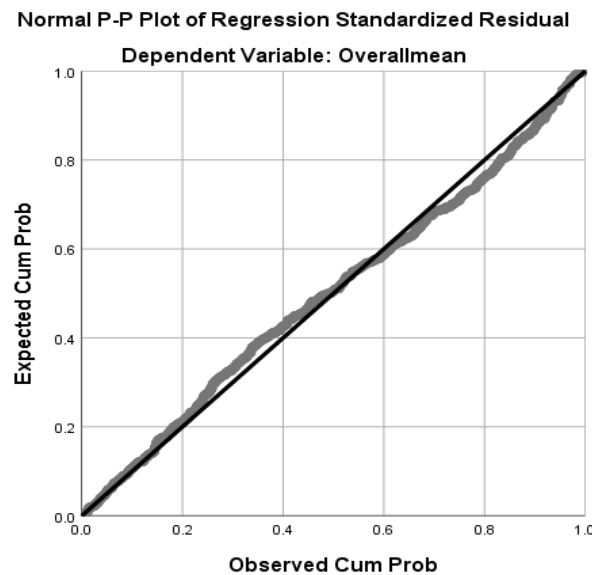
As far as communication competency of employees is concerned, the study found out that employees are communicating their thoughts and ideas in writing and orally slightly. Employees have moderate communication competency which helps them maintain direct contact with customers and they are moderately able to report information to their supervisors. Besides, there is a slight discussion with customers based on arguments to exchange ideas. This study is related to the findings of Puteh et al. (2016) which revealed that there are four critical competencies that are required by employees, namely functional competency, communication competency, leadership competency and cognitive competency.

Regarding teamwork, the study also revealed out that employees are able to share information openly with team members, cooperate to each other in resolving problems to some extent, slightly acknowledging their coworkers' competency and slightly participate in the development of team goals even though some of the team members are not able to address conflicts in groups as expected. Employees of the organization are not able to contribute their part towards organizational result achievement as expected. Moreover, the qualitative data from open-ended questions and focus group discussion support the quantitative data by stating that there is better participation of team members in different activities of the organization even though all members are not equally participated as expected. The finding is evidenced by Kawshala (2017) which shows that core competencies reflect the collective learning of an organization and involve coordinating diverse production skills and integrating multiple streams of technologies which includes communication, involvement, and a deep commitment to working across organizational boundaries, improving cross-functional teams within an organization to address boundaries and to overcome them.

In addition study found out that there is moderate capability of employees to contribute their part in the achievement of organizational goals even if employees are not able to made decision in reasonable time, take risks and yield significant result as much as needed. Besides, employees have a low capability to decide in their day to day activities in the organization and they use technology for their job, to communicate with other others, to collect and sore information. Moreover, the study revealed that employees of the organizations were not satisfied with their organization initiative to develop employees' core competency which consequently results with lack of employees required skills to serve their respective organizational customers. Response from focus group discussion contradict that most of employees are able to use the available technology but there is a limitation of technological infrastructure that encourage employees to

use technology in their day to day activities. The finding is indirectly related to study conducted by Danneels (2002) which suggest that use of technology had facilitate and improve competencies as a driving force for firm renewal and product innovation. From factors that influencing the development of employees' core competencies identified in the study area were employee commitment, organizational leaders' commitment, and motivation for the organization's goals, organization-provided training, and clearly stated organizational goals.

Figure 4.1 Test of Linearity



Linearity is one of the presumptions underlying linear regression. A Normal P-P plot was utilized to test this. A similar test is employed to examine the residuals' normal distribution. A graphical method for determining whether or not a data set is roughly normally distributed is the normal probability plot.

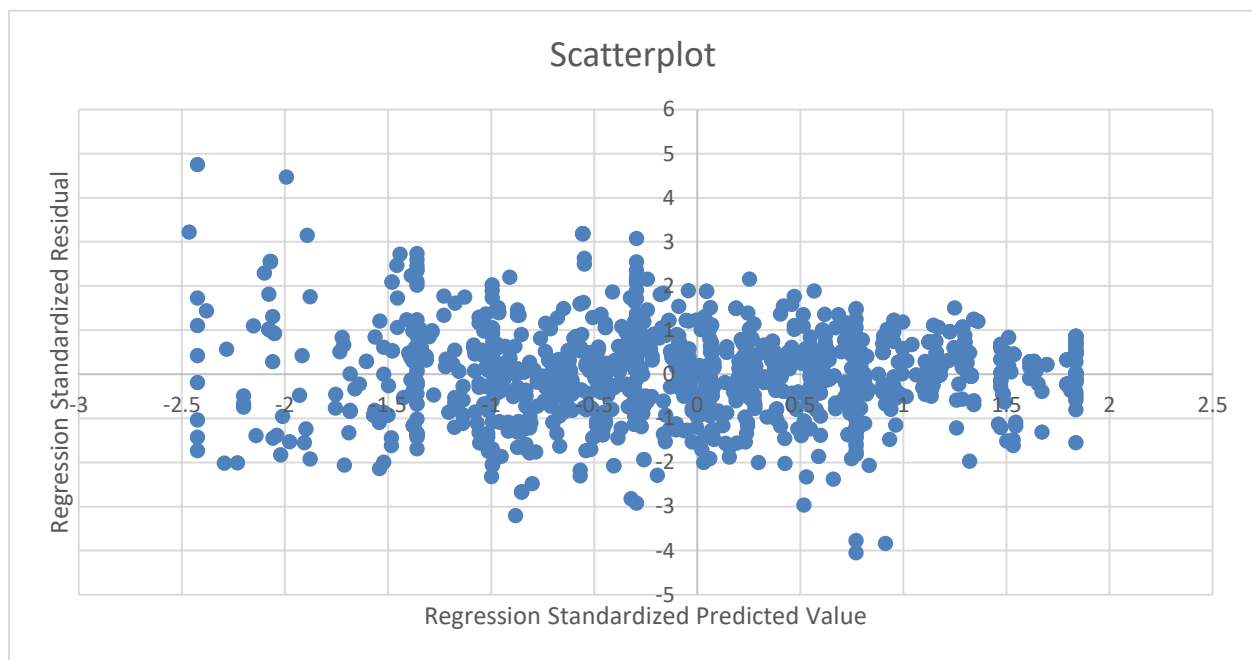
Table 4.13 Test of Multicollinearity

Determinant Factors of Employees Core Competency	Collinearity Test	
	Tolerance	VIF
Organizational leaders are committed in promoting employee's	0.392	2.554
Your organization clearly stated goals to enhance the skill of employees	0.366	2.734
Your organization conducts trainings to fill competency gaps of employees	0.375	2.669
Your organization has clear standards to evaluate employee's	0.362	2.760
Your organization has incentive systems to promote employees core competency	0.513	1.949
Employees are committed to develop their competency.	0.540	1.852
Employees are motivated by the goal of the organization	0.492	2.033

The points in the data are displayed against a hypothetical normal distribution such that they should roughly form a straight line. Deviations from the straight line signify a change from the norm. As Figure 4.1 demonstrated, the plot showed both linearity and normality.

According to Table 4.13's multicollinearity test, all of the VIF column values are less than 10 and all of the tolerance values are larger than 10%, respectively, proving that the explanatory variables are not affected by multicollinearity. The null hypothesis, which states that there is collinearity among the independent variables, is thus disproved.

Figure 4.2 Test of Heteroskedasticity



It can be argued that the regression model does not have a heteroscedasticity issue. As shown in Figure 4.2, the scatter plot output seems to indicate that the spots are diffused and do not create a distinct, recognizable pattern.

The significance level for the ANOVA test results was less than 0.05, as shown in Table 4.10. Therefore, it can be said that the model is appropriate for additional regression analysis.

The combined impacts of the predictor variables were responsible for 60.7% of the changes in the dependent variable. However, other variables not examined in the study account for 39.3% of the variances.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusions

The research focuses on five aspects of core competencies (customer-focused, communication, teamwork, goal achievement, and decision-making) and the variables influencing those competencies in order to evaluate and assess the core competencies of employees. The research

comes to the conclusion that, despite employees' moderate customer focus and communication with coworkers, there is a gap in their fundamental competencies. Additionally, the research finds that some employees, despite not being as expected, are better at teamwork.

The employees' status in achieving result, decision making and usage of technology to promote the status of their core competencies elements is not up to the standard of modern Era which enables employees competent enough in their organization.

The organizational leaders' commitment to promoting employees' technical skills, organizational incentive systems to promote employees' core competencies, and clear standards for organizations to evaluate employees' competencies were the first three low-rated factors that the respondents identified in the development of employees' core competencies.

The most important variables influencing the development of employees' core competencies in the Ethiopian Civil Service organizations were employees' and organizational leaders' commitment, employees' level of motivation for the organization's goal, the organization's provision of training, and the organization's clearly stated goals.

5.2 Recommendations

- It is recommended that Ethiopian civil service organizations increase employee engagement, inspire workers, and offer pertinent training to close employees' skill gaps.
- Organizations better to set standards to assess staff proficiency and explicitly articulate their goals for competency development.
- To help people build their core abilities, top-level managers needs to commit to doing so.
- The development of an incentive program that supports the promotion of employees' core competencies is advocated for organizations.
- The commitment of both employees and organizational leaders, the development of the organization's goals with clarity to drive employees, and the provision of suitable training are all important characteristics organizations need to try to improve.

Acknowledgements

First of all, we would like to praise the Lord and give our offering thanks to father, Almighty God for his mercy & grace. Besides, he has safeguarded and sheltered us from the hunters' trap by breaking it and taking a great care from any sudden actions and death problems.

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