

# Analysis of Physical Ability Tests in the Recruitment Process of Civil Servants in Burkina Faso

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**How to cite this paper:** Sawadogo, A., Nana, B., Ouédraogo, B. and Sanon Lompo, M.S. (2025) Analysis of Physical Ability Tests in the Recruitment Process of Civil Servants in Burkina Faso. *Open Journal of Safety Science and Technology*, 15, 378-390.

<https://doi.org/10.4236/ojsst.2025.154020>

**Received:** November 17, 2025

**Accepted:** December 15, 2025

**Published:** December 18, 2025

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## Abstract

Physical fitness is an essential criterion of hiring in many physical demanding jobs. The purpose of this study is to analyze physical ability tests used in the recruitment process of civil servants in Burkina Faso. Sixty-seven administrative documents dealing with physical fitness tests, consisting of communiqués, orders, decrees and laws on the organization of competitions and jobs in the civil service in force between 2022 and 2024, were used. A content analysis was conducted to identify the physical ability tests and the concerned jobs, as well as their characteristics. The results revealed five types of physical ability tests, including running, a test common to the twenty-two jobs identified. These tests are compulsory for all jobs covered by the direct competition as well as civilian professional jobs, and discretionary for paramilitary jobs. All of the tests do not meet the criteria for the validity of a physical fitness test in connection with a job. Their description, justifications and the health risks are not specified. These results established the inadequacy of current physical fitness tests to the requirements of the jobs. They recommend adapting them and strengthening the prevention of health and safety risks related to these tests.

## Keywords

Physical Ability Test, Physical Fitness, Civil Servant Recruitment, Active Job, Burkina Faso

## 1. Introduction

Occupational efficiency is a foundational element in the assessment of an individ-

ual productivity in workplace [1]. This efficiency depends on a several of factors, including physical, cognitive, and social abilities. The influence of each of factors depends type of work. For example, military, security and firefighter services are considered as physically demanding jobs in literature. In such professional domains, physical ability is most often part of the recruitment criteria of employers in both the private and public [2]-[4]. Two principal reasons justify the integration of these criteria in hiring process. The first one is physical efficiency at work, recruit to be able to perform physically demanding tasks in time and space [5].

The second is related to occupational health and safety, with physical ability being recognized as an element in the prevention of musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) related to physical load at work [2] [3] [5]-[7].

Given its significance, numbers of studies have been focused on physical ability tests in occupational settings. These tests are essential elements in active occupation recruitment processes. Reference [3] did a systematic review study on the association between military tasks and the physical ability tests. After analyzing the aggregated correlation data from the most relevant studies, they established that tests of cardiorespiratory fitness, lower limb strength, and upper limb muscular endurance are relevant aptitude tests for assessing the physical and health status of employees in these active jobs [8] [9]. Reference [10] conducted the same type of studies on police officers. They have shown through their literature review that physical fitness tests are relevant to the recruitment of police officers. They also identified the need to incorporate these tests into the physical fitness assessment of active police officers.

It is evident from the extant literature that subject has been extensively examined on a global scale, especially in the United States and Europe, with regard to its significance in employee efficiency. In Africa, the few studies on hiring processes do not address these physical ability tests but recognize their importance in the recruitment process for active jobs [11].

In Burkina Faso, there is no study to our knowledge on physical aptitude tests in professional recruitment. However, the state, through the Ministry of the Civil Service, is one of the largest employers, with about 11017 positions filled in 2024 [12]. It uses several hiring models in all sectors of activity. According to the 2024 statistical yearbook, these models are, among others:

- the direct competitive examination followed by training, which is a hiring method that allows the civil service to fill positions according to its needs through a test following which those admitted are trained in a vocational training establishment before being incorporated into the job [12];
- the professional competition, which consists of recruiting active staff members who meet the conditions required to be reclassified in the category higher than that occupied following a test and professional training [12];
- the professional examination, which is similar to the professional competition, but in this case, the candidate is reclassified in the category higher than his initial position as soon as he or she is definitively admitted [12];

- selection based on application files, which is a form of recruitment that allows the civil service to fill positions according to its needs by analyzing the files of candidates, following which those admitted are integrated and assigned [12].

Through these hiring methods, the Burkinabe State considers a number of criteria including physical fitness. The purpose of this study is to analyze the physical ability tests in these recruitments with a view to contributing to a better efficiency of civil servants. The study involves an examination of the physical aptitude tests that are utilized and their characteristics, along with the conditions for their implementation in civil service recruitment processes, with reference to the relevant jobs. To achieve this purpose, the following methodological approach has been adopted.

## 2. Methods

This study is descriptive, with a documentary analysis as its primary method. The analysis scope encompasses all administrative documents that provide information on the organization of direct and professional recruitments in the civil service from 2022 to 2024. This period is dealing with the application of the last ministry order signed in June 2021 which sets the rules of organization, the nature and the duration of the events of examination and professional competitions within the civil service in Burkina Faso. The purposive sampling technique was utilized for the selection of administrative documents. The following criteria were considered:

- be a recruitment notice, ministerial order, decree, Statistical Yearbook or law in force during the study period;
- be signed by a competent authority;
- be accessible through the official websites of the Ministry of the Civil Service, its branches or the ministries responsible for the jobs recruited;
- include the mention or information on the physical fitness tests.

Exhaustive sampling was employed; namely, all administrative documents which satisfied the aforementioned criteria were utilized. The total number of documents collated for this purpose amounted to sixty-seven.

A document analysis grid was used to collect data on physical ability tests and the jobs concerned.

## 3. Results

The characteristics of the 67 documents used are presented in **Table 1**. The majority of the documents used relate to the competitions, particularly the information on the conditions of participation in recruitment. The others deal with job specification.

### 3.1. Types of Physical Ability Test

**Table 2** shows the physical fitness tests used in civil service competitions, their status and the jobs concerned. Two main groups of active jobs emerge, civilian jobs in the field of physical education and sports, and jobs in the paramilitary field.

**Table 1.** Characteristics of the documents used.

Types	Content	Number
Communiqué	Opening of competitions	24
Ministerial order	Opening of competitions	28
	Recruitment procedure	02
Decree	Job Organizations	02
	Recruitment procedure	03
Law	Employment	04
Other	Strategic Direction	04
Total		67

**Table 2.** Jobs concerned by the physical aptitude tests.

Jobs concerned	Weight of PAT <sup>a</sup>	Status	Tests
MAPS <sup>d</sup>	50% to 70%	Obligatory	Running (middle distance + sprint) + Jumping + Throwing + Gymnastics + Team sports) Sometimes only running
CP <sup>c</sup> PAPS	30%	Obligatory	Running (middle distance + sprint)
CD <sup>b</sup> CAP CEG <sup>e</sup> -EPS <sup>f</sup>	15% to 30%	Obligatory	Running (Middle Distance + Sprint) + Jumping or Throwing + Gymnastics)
CP PC <sup>f</sup> LC <sup>h</sup> -EPS	25%	Obligatory	Running (Middle Distance + Sprint) + Jump or Throw)
Customs CD (P <sup>m</sup> , A <sup>j</sup> , C <sup>k</sup> and I <sup>l</sup> )	30%	Obligatory	
CD EF (A, C and I)	30% to 60%	Obligatory	Running (middle distance + sprint)
SP <sup>o</sup> CD (P, A, C, and I)	30%	Obligatory	
PR EF <sup>n</sup> (C and I)	30%	Mandatory or exempt	Middle distance run
Customs CP (C and I)	30%	Choice or exemption	Running (middle distance or sprint)
CP SP (A, C and I)	30%		

a. physical ability test; b. direct competition; c. Professional Competition; d. physical and sports activity teacher; e. Physical and Sports Activities supervisor; f. certified teacher; g. General Education College; h. High school and college; i. Physical education and sports; j. assistant; k. advisor; l. inspector; m. attendant; n. water and forests; o. prison security.

Twenty-two (22) jobs were identified in this study as integrating physical fitness testing into their recruitment process. Five (05) types of events have been identified with the running as a common event for all jobs. These tests are compulsory for all direct competitive examinations and certain professional competitions (PAPS, PC LC, PC CEG) and discretionary for other professional competitive examinations.

### 3.2. The Characteristics of the Tests

The concepts “physical and sporting test” and “sporting events” are used to refer to physical fitness tests. An analysis of the various texts indicates that all of these tests are intended to assess the physical abilities of the candidates without specifications. As far as their choice is concerned, it appears that they are proposed by resource persons with regard to their technical, professional and intellectual skills or by structures competent in the subjects covered by the competition. Specifically, the sources and process of their identified tests do not appear. **Table 3** gives the specific characteristics of each test.

**Table 3.** Characteristics of physical ability tests.

Tests	Specifications	Description	Physical fitness assessed	Evaluation framework
Running	Male (1/2 long distance = 1000 m and speed = 100 m)	Indication of start and end lines as well as signal type	No specific details	Scale/out of 20 points
	Female (1/2 long distance = 800 m and speed = 80 m)	Accuracy of how to annotate race time		Scale/out of 20 points
Jump	Length (optional)	Indication of the number of attempts, jumping boards	No specific details	Scale/out of 20 points
	Triple jump (your choice)			Scale/out of 20 points
	Height (optional)	Accuracy of how to annotate casting distance		Scale/out of 20 points
Throw	Weight (optional)	Indication of the number of tests, types of equipment	No specific details	Scale/out of 20 points
	Javelin (your choice)			Scale/out of 20 points
	Disc (of your choice)	Accuracy of how to annotate casting distance		Scale/out of 20 points
Gymnastics	Male	Baccalaureate sequences	No specific details	out of 20 points
	Female	Baccalaureate sequences		out of 20 points
Team sport	Football (your choice)	No specific description	No specific details	out of 20 points
	Handball (your choice)			out of 20 points
	Volleyball (your choice)			out of 20 points
	Basketball (your choice)			out of 20 points

### 3.3. Risks of Implementing Aptitude Tests and Protection of Candidates

Related to the risks associated with these physical tests, there is no mention about it. However, the analysis of the documents reveals four types of safeguards. The first, which is common to all jobs, concerns the provision of medical rescue teams on the sites of the administration of the tests. The second protective measure is the requirement of a medical certificate before the tests for certain jobs such as that of certified teachers of general education, even if the specific information requested relates more to visual acuity, deafness and stuttering. The third measure is the possibility of exemption from the test on the basis of a certificate of incapacity issued by a military or paramilitary physician. Finally, the fourth measure

comes after the tests and seems to be specific to paramilitary jobs. This is the medical examination for incorporation.

#### 4. Discussion

The objective of this study is to analyze the physical fitness tests used in the recruitment of civil servants in Burkina Faso. To do this, 67 valid administrative documents of various types that deal with the organization of competitions during the period from 2022 to 2024 were used.

The first specific objective of the analysis was to identify the jobs concerned by the physical aptitude tests during the recruitment of civil servants. To this end, **Table 1** shows that 22 jobs are concerned, including 18 paramilitary jobs such as Water and Forests, Customs and Prison Security staff and 4 civilian jobs related to physical education and sport. Physical fitness tests are part of the process of evaluating changes of job (professional competitions) as well as that of entry into the various jobs (direct competitions). These tests count for 15% to 60% of the candidates' eligibility. It appears that consideration of the physical aspects is attributable to the physical commitment demanded by the training and/or exercise of the profession. Indeed, most studies on physical fitness for work consider security and defense jobs as active jobs, as well as those related to sports and physical education [13]-[16]. Specifically, firefighters, security guards and military personnel stand out as the most physically demanding [17]. All of these authors recognize that access to these types of employment requires physical fitness tests [2]. Regarding civilian jobs, reference [18] followed by [19] studies established that there is a wide variety of jobs in the field of physical education, physical activities and sports. Of course, all of them are not physically demanding. However, references [20] and [21] report that the training of Physical Education teachers and experts in adapted physical activities include practical aspects that undoubtedly require a certain physical aptitude. In addition to these civilian jobs in the field of physical education, physical activity and sports, paramedical jobs such as stretcher bearers, ambulance drivers are also recognized in the literature as active jobs. In Burkina Faso, these jobs are classified in the hospital civil service.

As far as the physical ability tests used are concerned, the results indicate that the middle-distance race (1000 meters for men and 800 meters for women) is common to all jobs. In addition, there is the sprint race event (100 meters for men and 80 meters for women). Several studies mention running as tests to assess physical fitness during recruitment, however there is a difference between the nature of these races. Unlike sprints of 100 or 80 meters, test shuttle races are widely recognized in recent studies [10] [22] [23]. Similarly, the middle-distance running used by the various authors are mainly the 1- and 2.5-mile run (about 1600 and 4000 meters) and the Cooper test [14] [15] [23]-[28]. [29] report through their study on the history of fitness assessment and physical preparation in the United States Army, that the 100- and 2000-meter sprint tests were the first tests to be used in the context of military recruitment around the 1920s. This is also the case

of team sporting, including but not limited to volleyball, basketball, handball and football. From this study results, these sports events appear in the recruitment for jobs in the field of sports and physical education. The use of a physical ability test is justified in principle by its validity to evaluate specific parameters related to physical fitness and employment [24] [30]. Indeed, in all the studies mentioned above, the authors have specified for each test used, the specific parameters of the physical condition evaluated. These physical fitness parameters include cardiorespiratory endurance, upper limb muscular resistance and lower limb strength for military jobs. Their choices stem from a knowledge of physical fitness and that of the physical foundations of employment. In this regard, [29] indicate that the new physical tests of the US military are the result of the most comprehensive review and evaluation possible providing a solid scientific basis based on current knowledge of the physical condition and physical demands of military operations. [24], on the other hand, report from a literature review that the choice of a physical test for a job must follow a two-step process, the analysis of job tasks and the analysis of physical demands. On this point, the results of the present study reveal that the tests are chosen by resource persons by considering their technical, professional and intellectual skills. However, as shown in **Table 3**, there is a lack of details on skills assessed in relation to job duties and physical demands as suggested by [24]. The analysis of the different tests through the same table shows that several of them are competitive sports events. This apprehension is confirmed the concept of “physical and sporting tests” and “sporting events” that are used to designate these physical aptitude tests. As proof, the 100-metre, 800-metre and 1000-metre races, the throws (discus, javelin or shot put) and the jumps (triple jump, long jump or high jump) are athletics events with world records. It is also known as Handball, Football, Volleyball, Basketball and Gymnastics as sports disciplines in their own right.

Through the description and evaluation standards of these tests in **Table 3**, they are presented as a form of adaptation of sports or scholar disciplines for an evaluation of physical abilities with scales, despite the lack of precision concerning the skills evaluated. For example, the gymnastics test in the hiring process is described as the Gymnastic test of Baccalaureate. That is another consideration of the school examination test in physical education and sports as tests of physical ability in the recruitment competition for job. Referring to [24], this ambiguity may have several consequences with regard to the validity of these tests. According to these authors, a physical aptitude test in the context of recruitment into an active job must be valid through the three main categories: content validity, criterion validity and construct validity.

Content validity reflects the fact that the test adequately represents the area of physical demands of the job for which the candidate is recruited [24]. Our results indicate that job requirements are not clearly stated. The requirements are expressed globally as the ability to perform active day and night service. This general description of the activities related to tasks of job concerned does not make it pos-

sible to assess their relationship with the physical ability tests proposed.

The second criterion of validity deals with the existence of a demonstrated relationship between the test scores and a relevant direct or indirect measure of work performance. This criterion questions the foundations of the grade scales used in our study. It is clear that our results do not provide details on the process of developing these scales to judge their relevance. However, it also became clear that there is no established relationship between the tests assessed by these scales and the physical abilities required for the jobs. Consequently, the grades or scores from these scales cannot establish a direct correlation between the skills required for each job and the results obtained during the assessments.

Finally, construct validity responds to the fact that the test can be identified with an underlying fundamental physiological capacity, such as aerobic power, strength. [24]. No aptitude is mentioned, according to the data of our study, to be evaluated. However, it is plausible to hypothesize that the speed tests (100 and 80 meters) are considered tests to assess speed ability. The middle-distance events (800 and 1,000 meters) are considered cardiorespiratory endurance tests. The other events (throws, jumps and sports) are, on the other hand, considered as tests to assess the technical abilities specific to each sport. In the event that this hypothesis is proven, the validity of the construction cannot be satisfied because it was found in the previous analysis that the relationship between the tests mentioned and the physical abilities required for the jobs is not proven. It has also been shown that these tests do not meet the criteria of a physical fitness test.

Overall, it appears that the criteria for the validity of the tests identified in the context of the civil service competitions are compromised because the data obtained do not make it possible to establish that they are derived from a job analysis, that they are indicators of professional tasks or work results, or that they are demonstrated to be valid indicators of these tasks. The failure to meet these fundamental criteria calls into question the credibility of these tests for equal employment opportunity and occupational health and safety [24]. The tests identified in our study are ambivalent in nature, oscillating between a competitive sports dimension and an evaluative approach in a school context. However, the tests used for assessment of the physical abilities required for a given job, are not in either of these two dimensions. About the school context, the regulations of the examinations of the physical education and sports tests of primary education and general technical and vocational secondary education specify that the physical education and sports tests aim to evaluate the physical abilities of the candidate to succeed in performance in some activities [31]. These exam tests cover components of two activities: athletics and floor gymnastics or swimming. This definition does not include any reference framework for physical fitness to be evaluated. The regulation contains a scale to get grades not a physical fitness components standard references, which is essential to the validity of a physical fitness test related to a job. This means that the tests at physical education exam focus only on performance in some activities at the time of assessment, not a link to a specific physical fitness ability like

strength, endurance, or resistance necessary for job tasks.

Related to sport, it is known that performing in a sport requires the development of certain physical fitness components depending on the type of performance and this is the objective of training [32]. For example, in professional sports such as the 100 meters race and 800 meters race cited as physical tests in our results, the athletes are recruiting by the clubs through fitness test. In sport competition the focus is to win, not to assess physical ability for job. In the specific context of job search in the context of civil service competitions in Burkina Faso, this ambiguity can be a source of recurrent litigation. For instance, the civil service employs a variety of grading scales that are different from those utilized in school institutions, despite the underlying principles of these scales are not clearly definite. Consequently, candidates frequently voice grievances regarding their grades, citing the school grading scales as a primary source of reference. The same can be said of the utilization of medical certificates of incapacity when such documents are authorized in the context of competitions. It is evident that a divergence of opinion exists amongst candidates regarding the interpretation of these physical test regulations. In sport perspective is that any injury sustained during the course of competition that block it, can be considered a loss for the wounded. However, the other vindicated viewpoint also cites school regulations that permit the issue of a medical certificate of incapacity [33].

It is important to note that, like any physical activity, physical fitness tests can carry health risks for candidates [24] [34]-[37]. These risks are particularly relevant to people with certain medical disorders of the cardiovascular, pulmonary and musculoskeletal systems [35]. According to [34], the most serious of these risks is heart attack. In low-income countries, such as Burkina Faso, these risks associated with the recruitment test would be further amplified. Indeed, in a context of job shortage, candidates frequently find themselves compelled to exert significant effort to secure a position, despite the uncertainty surrounding the compatibility of their health status with the demands of the tests. This reality implies the adoption of specific measures to ensure the protection of candidates and, where appropriate, to ensure that they are taken care of in the event of an incident on the ground [34]. Our results show that this aspect of potential risks associated with physical and sporting events is not explicitly mentioned. However, protective measures are planned. In terms of regulations, medical rescue teams must be deployed at the test administration sites. In addition, the presentation of a medical certificate is a prerequisite for taking part in the examinations relating to the employment of certified teachers of general education. It should also be remembered that this certificate does not relate to the contraindication to physical tests but rather to deafness, visual acuity and stuttering. In addition, the application for professional competitions for paramilitary jobs may require a certificate of incapacity. Contrary to what emerges from the literature, all of these measures do not specify the responsibility of stakeholders in the face of these risks. Definitely, through the study of authors such as [34], it appears that to protect themselves against the risks associated with

physical activity, the candidate for physical fitness tests should consult physician to detect any existing condition requiring special attention. This is the reason why a medical certificate of no contraindication should be presented by all candidates for their own safety. Other authors, in the context of the validation of tests, recommend the signing of a contentment preceded by a statement of the possible risks associated with these tests [38] [39].

## 5. Conclusions

Through this study, it became clear that physical aptitude tests are part of the mechanisms used in the recruitment of civil servants in Burkina Faso. These tests concern paramilitary jobs and those related to physical education, or physical activity and sports. However, the tests chosen have an ambiguous character that makes their relevance and especially validity difficult. The risks associated with their implementation and the physical abilities they assess are poorly regulated. The findings of this study raise relevant questions concerning the mastery of physical fitness tests by the actors concerned by recruitment in the various jobs in the civil service. Comprehensive research, including all stakeholders, technicians responsible for the selection and administration of physical fitness tests, assessors and employers, could contribute to a better understanding of the test choices made. In addition, consideration of the physical requirements inherent in the jobs in question could provide a basis for the development or selection of relevant tests, aimed at minimizing the risk of litigation. For that purpose, the study highlights the need for the Civil Service Ministry to commission task analysis for key active employments, mainly the paramilitary tasks to pilot the development of a validated, content-specific physical ability test.

In practical terms, the results of the study highlight the urgent need to implement measures to ensure the safety of candidates as well as to ensure legal coverage for all stakeholders, given the health risks associated with these tests. It should be required that a medical certificate of non-contraindication be presented for all applications in occupations that entail a physical ability test.

## Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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