

Teacher Evaluation as a Tool for Professional Development: A Case of Saudi Arabia

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Abstract

This study reports on the use of teacher evaluation and appraisal process as a tool for professional development. A group of 30 teachers from seven different nationalities with diverse qualifications and teaching experiences participated in this case study at the English Language Institute (ELI) at King Abdulaziz University (KAU), Saudi Arabia. All participants were given two surveys (one online and the other paper-based) including several statements based on a Likert scale in order to investigate the extent to which they were aware of the teacher observation and evaluation processes at their institution. The level of student achievement was also considered as an integral component of the teacher evaluation as well as evidence for the teacher performance. Analysis of the data indicated that the participants held different opinions on the current evaluation and appraisal process at ELI. The teachers also expressed their viewpoints on the student success and failure as the key indicators of the teacher performance level.

Keywords: Professional development; Teacher evaluation; Teacher effectiveness; Saudi Arabia

1. Introduction

The existing ideology that supports the process of rating a teacher as an effective or progressive one is based on a specific set of measurable statistical scale. The process of teacher evaluation is usually dependent on institutional requirements applied based on a given set of rules and comments collected annually or biannually. Observation data are collected within a given time frame and location where a teacher is observed while demonstrating a blending of specific skills according to the pacing guide as per the institutional curriculum plan. Seidel and Shavelson (2007), however, warned against a series of unaccountable factors that could function as assortment variables to the teaching and learning process (Tuytens, & Devos, 2011; Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008).

Having worked as an educator and official observer for many years, I was curious to analyze the observation and evaluation processes at ELI in order to obtain an insight into the possible intricacies of these phenomena and to suggest an alternative method of formal observation that could help teachers value their contributions to their professional growth in general and help them enhance the standards of education in particular.

1.1 Theoretical background

The theoretical backbone of this study revolves around the comparative ideology for the emergence of education, teaching qualities, and the quantitative approach of the social sciences to measure the human behavior, especially a wide range of skills and attitudes that could be accumulated to display the phenomenon of effective teaching. Postman (1993) believed that social sciences and the related theories are not the ultimate factors to quantify human behaviors, arguing that researchers cannot apply the rigid scientific principles set by natural sciences to produce objective and verifiable theories and facts in other categories. Postman (1993) did not also support the idea of applying the scientific principles to human conditions and the design of universal laws related to human behavior. In addition, Dewey (1916) believed that education is based on the intellectual development of the individual learner, allowing the growth of societies by the positive transformation throughout the world. The constructivism methodology has been around as a means of developing the concept of learning by practice, which has reemerged today through innovative teaching skills. Dewey (1916) also supported the integration of content areas, differentiation based on student learning needs, the introduction of learner autonomy, and the establishment of the link between teaching settings in a formal learning environment and real life teaching settings in a broader community.

Nearly a century ago, however, Taylor (1911) presented the basic scientific understanding of education, suggesting that the approach to factory-based production would have a positive influence on education. Put simply, the human labor aims at the production of efficiency and getting the task done (Taylor, 1911). Due to the perspective of considering learning as a tool, the principles of factory management were promptly acknowledged and applied to the supervision projects for schools and teachers (Blumberg, 1974). Later, Cubberley (1916) noticed the importance and practicality of Taylor's model and successfully developed a level of administrative control in the teaching profession to skillfully apply this concept to the schools management and teachers. Cubberley (1916) viewed schools as being factories in which the raw products (children) have to be shaped and fashioned into products to cope with various demands of life.

The specifications for this manufacturing process came from the demands of the twentieth-century civilization, and schools accomplished their business by shaping their students according to these specifications.

However, the controversial ideology of social engineering proposed by Cubberley (1916) was soon challenged, and many competing theories emerged on the scene of education. Most of these theories focused on the reliable measures for the student learning process and on formulating the measurable and clear aims for teachers and students. The idea of incorporating the aptitude tests for the ability quantification of all learners from school to university level was one of the results of these developments in measuring the student learning.

1.2 Teachers' role

To analyze the role of a teacher, it is imperative to understand the "performance competency checklists" (Larsen, 2005, p. 289). Teachers' role as the knowledge and information processor in multiple roles at an institution is vital in this regard. In an autonomous context, teachers play the role of facilitators, guides and assistants in their students learning (Schreyer Institute for Teaching Excellence, 2007). One of the most dynamic roles of teachers is developing a deeper and fuller understanding of a particular subject. More importantly, teachers' role is acknowledged as a professional and moral asset constantly reflecting a positive image on children and young adults (Eacute & Esteve, 2000). Furthermore, teachers' role as a professional assessor while making objective judgments about the effectiveness of their students' learning reflects their own effectiveness as teachers (National Union of Teachers, 2011). While gauging their performance, teachers' role as experts in time management for learning process and preparation of lessons based on learning outcomes counts a lot (National Union of Teachers, 2011). In other words, teachers need to help their students for developing the constructive ideas so that they are ready for the next learning phase (Riding & Rayner, 1998). This, however, behooves teachers to be resourceful and keep abreast of the latest teaching knowledge and approaches, something that could in the long run also result in their professional development (Pennington, 1994).

Research has found that after having an initial four years of study and obligatory rite of passage through their first year of teaching, teachers find themselves unprepared for the classroom exposure (Gettinger, 1988). As Henderson and Berla (1994) also mentioned, besides their period of training, teachers learn that success in the classroom is often strengthened within the wider context of family and community relationships. This means that the social dynamic of family interactions and interpersonal communication and understanding abilities play vital roles in determining the student success (Kazdin, 1995). This further suggests that students' beliefs about their teachers are regarded as uncontrolled variables in teaching and learning processes (Walker, Ramsey & Colvin, 1995). There are, however, some certain factors, such as the inconsistency of the human personality and the psychodynamic of teacher-student relations (Merisca, Kellam, Ling, Brown & Ialongon, 1988) that may determine a successful day in a classroom. The model of reflective practice proposed by Zeichner and Liston (1987) admits that these uncontrollable variables can at the same time promote teachers to reflect on their weaknesses and strengths. Yet, measuring the range of variation for such a phenomenon in teaching and learning processes is complicated and hard to gauge (Seidel & Shavelson, 2007).

1.3 Evaluation of effective teaching

The effectiveness of a teacher's performance appears to depend upon the strong link between educational and socioeconomic factors and values that integrate to develop a set of evaluation criteria. This is important to have an accurate and well-thought, measurable set of criteria in order to evaluate teachers in any educational setting. However, there is a never-ending controversy between the public and private education concerning the most effective way to utilize these tools for the teacher appraisal.

Mathison and Ross (2007) maintained that one of the major goals of education is the effective, measurable teaching that should be in complete alignment with the quantifiable and measurable data about teacher performance. Many scholars (e.g., Costa & Garmeston, 2002; Eisner, 1985; Glickman, 2001; Smyth, 1988; Waite, 1995) proposed distinct models about evaluating the process of teaching and learning. A majority of these models integrated all components of multiple ideas towards the teaching process with integral modules of the learning process (Seidel & Shavelson, 2007). As a result, the established combination theory encourages teachers to reflect and understand the most suitable practice tools that are effective for them. More recent research (e.g., Seidel & Shavelson, 2007) established the fact that during the last three decades the effectiveness of the teaching process and teacher performance has been dependent on a process-product model, which has led to the establishment of various theoretical models about the effective teaching and its variables. Such models have focused on a sensitive factor, indicating that the teaching process and teacher effectiveness are affected and gauged by student outcomes.

According to the latest approach, the process of teaching and learning should be based on the process of integration of both the explicit and implicit curriculum. Evidently, test scores and statistical outcomes do not only rely on the teaching practice adapted by teachers and the learning styles of students, but are deeply affected by the interpersonal relationship between teachers and learners. Besides, there are some factors that function as additional variables, such as the nature of the curriculum (type and content) and the number of students in a class, which may affect the teacher effectiveness.

Seidel and Shavelson (2007) contended that within a classroom the teaching process has various effects on the students' learning process. For instance, some of the vital supplementary variables that are significant in measuring the teacher effectiveness are instructional time, individual learning styles, and learners' needs. However, some minor variables such as financial resources, domestic and community support, specific student and teacher needs and particular abilities, and health and psychological behaviors cannot be overlooked (Anyon, 1981). That said, a vast array of variables and different components of the educational practices seem to have effects on the performance of teachers' teaching and

students' learning (Seidel & Shavelson, 2007). Even after developing a set of tools that are designed to capture and organize significant aspects of the above-mentioned factors, it is believed that measuring the effectiveness of a teacher is an intricate undertaking, as the practical approaches and practices applied in the teaching process to acquire the required learning standards are also complicated and multidimensional (Seidel & Shavelson, 2007).

2. The study

This study employed case study approach to collect the first-hand knowledge and experiences of the participants who are directly involved in the research process (Stake, 1995). The case study is specifically more practical than other research instruments while studying the role of various factors in the teaching, learning and appraisal processes. Another reason for the selection of case study was its wide recognition in education (Stake, 1995). Considering the fact that measuring teacher effectiveness is an intricate and difficult process, a case study approach could help to find qualitative data on the issues under scrutiny, empowering research to move beyond the key ideas by involving the participants in a valid evaluation process (George & Bennett, 2005). More importantly, the teacher evaluation process as a case study brings a powerful impact because the appraisal process is always considered as the most important for teachers' professional development (Peterson & Peterson, 2006), or in some cases for the renewal of the teaching contract. The use of case study is also effective because the appraisal process being the effective tool used to increase the teacher morale and performance level needs a comprehensive and efficient way to express the teachers' beliefs about the subject. Consequently, recording the feedback and beliefs of teachers, who are the direct subject of the appraisal process for their proficiency and accomplishment, is essential from ethical and professional perspective. Finally, a case study helps the researcher to understand more clearly the participants' perceptions of the level of fairness and transparency of the process.

The key rationale behind conducting this research was to highlight the opinions and thoughts of educators about the teacher appraisal process. The purpose was to allow them to reflect on their practice because even after being the main subject of the process they are rarely consulted when the evaluation process and tools are selected in their professional working boundaries. It is hoped that results from this study lead to unveiling the important ideas that are essential to developing unconventional, valuable, and effective ways that could be taken into account in order to enhance the teacher effectiveness. More specifically, this study intends to answer the following questions:

1. To what extent are the teachers aware of the evaluation process?
2. What are the teachers' opinions about the selection of the evaluators and criteria for the teacher evaluation process?
3. What are the teachers' viewpoints on the indicators of students' success and failure?

2.1 Participants

This research was conducted at ELI at KAU in Saudi Arabia. A total of 30 female teachers from seven different nationalities, with various teaching experiences, and from different age groups participated in this study (see Table 1). Confidentiality was promised, and the teachers participated voluntarily in the study.

Table 1. Participants of the study by age and nationality

Nationality	Age range	Number of teachers
Saudi	32-36	5
Egyptians	33-40	8
Americans	35-42	4
Tunisian	36-41	7
Indians	35-42	2
British	38-44	2
Jordanian	34-37	2

2.2 Data collection

Two types of surveys (an online and a paper-based) based on a Likert four-point bipolar scale were employed to investigate the participants' opinions and experiences about the teacher evaluation and appraisal processes and procedures. Using such scales has been an effective way for examining the teachers' perceptions of different issues in education because scales could reflect as well as cater for the complexity and at the same time flexibility of humans' behaviors and responses to different phenomena (Amstrong, 1987).

3. Findings

Analysis of the participants' responses to the administered surveys, both the online and the paper-based versions, indicated that they held different opinions and viewpoints on the current evaluative process at ELI. The results also revealed a variety of perceptions on the relation of student success and failure as the key indicators of the teacher performance level as well as on the objectivity of the evaluation process. As shown in Table 2, a majority of the

respondents (73%) agreed with the fact that the process of teacher evaluation helps to enhance the level of professional development.

Table 2. Teachers' opinions on the relationship between the teacher evaluation and professional development

Response rating	Number of Participants	Percentage
Strongly Agree	4	13%
Agree	18	60%
Disagree	6	20%
Strongly disagree	2	7%

Regarding the teachers' opinions on the relationship between the standard of teaching and constructive appraisal, the results illustrated in Table 3 show that 84% of the respondents agreed that the standards of teaching could be improved by the constructive appraisal process at ELI.

Table 3. Teachers' opinions on the relationship between the standards of teaching and appraisal process

Response rating	Number of Participants	Percentage
Strongly Agree	8	27%
Agree	17	57%
Disagree	4	13%
Strongly disagree	1	3%

However, the teachers did not hold a strong opinion on the situation of the current system of the teacher evaluation process at their institution. As shown in Table 4, only 47% of the respondents were satisfied with the current system of the teacher evaluation at ELI.

Table 4. Teachers' opinions on the current system of the teacher evaluation

Response rating	Number of Participants	Percentage
Strongly Agree	2	7%
Agree	12	40%
Disagree	10	33%
Strongly disagree	6	20%

By the same token, most of the teachers (60%) disagreed with the idea that teachers should be directly responsible for the students' success rate (Table 5), a point that might need further empirical research.

Table 5. Teachers' opinions on their responsibility for students' success rate

Response rating	Number of Participants	Percentage
Strongly Agree	2	7%
Agree	10	33%
Disagree	16	53%
Strongly disagree	2	7%

The same percentage of the teachers disagreed that the student performance should be a part of appraisal rubrics for the teacher evaluation system (Table 6). This point also could be further investigated through more qualitative instruments such as in-depth interviews.

Table 6. Teachers' opinions on the ratio of the student performance and appraisal rubrics

Response rating	Number of Participants	Percentage
Strongly Agree	0	0%
Agree	12	40%
Disagree	15	50%
Strongly disagree	3	10%

In addition, when asked about the objectivity of the current appraisal system to measure the teacher performance, only 43% of the participants expressed their satisfaction with this statement (Table 7).

Table 7. Teachers' opinions on the objectivity of the current evaluation system

Response rating	Number of Participants	Percentage
Strongly Agree	5	16%
Agree	8	27%
Disagree	15	50%
Strongly disagree	2	7%

Also, an overwhelming majority of the teachers (83%) did not endorse the idea of having a certified and well-trained team of observers if there exists a set of evaluation criteria and rubrics for evaluating teachers (Table 8). In other words, they believed that the trained and objective observers are the key factors to accomplish a fair evaluation process.

Table 8. Teachers' opinions on the necessity of a certified and well-trained team of observers

Response rating	Number of Participants	Percentage
Strongly Agree	0	0%
Agree	5	17%
Disagree	18	60%
Strongly disagree	7	23%

Finally, an overwhelming majority of the teachers (83%) viewed peer evaluation and appraisal as being a meaningful and worthwhile process when supported by coaching and mentoring (Table 9).

Table 9. Teachers' opinions on the coaching and mentoring in the evaluation process

Response rating	Number of Participants	Percentage
Strongly Agree	10	33%
Agree	15	50%
Disagree	3	10%
Strongly disagree	2	7%

4. Discussion

The findings of this study revealed that the teachers at ELI supported the common belief that the teacher evaluation and appraisal processes could enhance the level of professional development and lead to the teaching improvement if conducted in a constructive approach. In fact, not only can the teacher evaluation system play a significant role in the professional development, but it can also improve the teacher performance (Peterson & Peterson, 2006), help students achieve better results, and improve the overall quality of education (Ovando, 2001; Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008). However, the teachers in this study expressed dissatisfaction with the current schemes of the teacher evaluation system at ELI. The teachers' dissatisfaction may originate from the purpose of the evaluation process, which could not be designed to find fault with teachers rather than applied to improve the quality of students' learning and education in general.

The teachers also did not hold the responsibility for the students' success or failure rate, disagreeing that students' performance should be included as a part of appraisal rubrics for the teacher evaluation. Perhaps in addition to evaluating the teacher performance at the end of a program or semester, the teacher evaluation process needs to be formative to help teachers hold more accountability for their performance (Avalos & Assael, 2006; Stronge, 2006). Moreover, the teachers opined that the appraisal system practiced at their institution was not objective enough to measure their performance properly, calling for the trained and objective observers to conduct a fair evaluation. They also supported peer evaluation provided that it is accompanied by coaching and mentoring, suggesting that peer coaching and mentoring can be a successful alternative to a regular evaluation system to measure the teacher performance.

5. Conclusion

The findings of this case study imply that teaching and learning are multidimensional processes that are linked through a unified core of ideas and philosophies. The historical background of the teaching profession shows that there exist a

plethora of factors involved in measuring the learning outcomes for students as well as measuring the performance of teachers (Goldhaber, 2006). The debate spurred by this research study and findings assert that the peer appraisal supported by the mentoring and coaching process can be the best suitable way to improve the teacher performance. This, in turn, could result in a swift compromise that contributes to setting a diverse and highly reliable performance scale. It could be, however, concluded that a great deal of factors (especially contextual and ideological factors) such as the leadership characteristics of a given institution, the goal of evaluation and the way teachers are informed of the process (Tuytens & Devos, 2011; Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008) should be taken into account in designing or applying a teacher evaluation or appraisal system. Finally, more research in different contexts is needed to come up with more valid teacher evaluation systems (Kyriakides & Demetriou, 2007).

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