TEACHER PERFORMANCE EVALUATION IN OMAN AS PERCEIVED BY EVALUATORS

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Abstract_ *A systematic teacher evaluation seems to be instrumental in enhancing teacher professionalism. However, the road to good implementation of teacher evaluation system rarely goes straightforward without challenges and constraints. In this context, the main purpose of this study was to examine and analyse the teacher performance evaluation in Oman as perceived by evaluators. This investigative study was conducted using the qualitative approach. Seven schools in the Sultanate of Oman were selected as the research site with nine senior teachers, two supervisors, and three school principals of the selected schools as the respondents. The study indicated that participants are sceptical if the evaluation can improve noticeably the teacher professional development. They attributed that to some factors such as lack of time, confidentiality, and lack of incentives, and the law impact of teacher evaluation on teacher performance. These finding should, however, alert the policy designers in the Ministry to the sizable gap that exists between the documented policy of teacher evaluation system and its implementation.*

Key words: *teacher evaluation, Oman, teacher professionalism, qualitative approach.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Like any professional, teachers have been exposed to evaluate their performance. In many countries teachers as well as other professionals in the education system have been subjected to professional evaluation in various ways. Teacher evaluation is widely admired as a significant tool that has the potential to ensure teaching improvement and quality. Teacher evaluation has become a matter of general concern recently, not only among educators but for the public as well. Darling-Hammond [1] points out that "the public has come to believe that the key to educational improvement lies as much in upgrading the quality of teachers as in revamping school programs and curricula". Sound quality teacher evaluation system ensures obtaining qualified teachers because "defining and knowing quality teaching is the first step in the appraisal process of teachers"[2].

However, teacher evaluation is frequently perceived as a process that becomes "little more than a time-consuming charade [3]. Moreover, "it yields little of value to either the teachers or the schools in which they work, simultaneously feeling like a' gotcha to the teachers while consuming a great deal of administrator time"[4]. Furthermore, Danielson and McGreal [4] note, many teacher evaluation models are flawed systems, relying on out-dated evaluative criteria, inappropriate assumptions about effective teaching and learning, lack of precision in evaluating performance, and using a one-size-fits-all approach for novice and veteran teachers.

The Sultanate of Oman has embarked, during the last four decades or so, on a courageous reform of its entire education system. At the heart of this progression are teachers who carry out the curriculum and principals who ensure that school plan represent current curricular thinking, successful methodology, and, most significantly, demonstrated learning on the part of students.

A- OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Teacher evaluation is an effective means by which evaluators provide helpful feedback to the teacher and recommend approaches to improve his performance. Andrews [2] argues that "teaching can be improved through teacher evaluation if it is taken seriously, accomplished by competent administrators and supported by serious governing boards' intent on improving instruction in their schools". Based on this premise, this study was meant to investigate whether the teacher evaluation in the selected region implemented in the way that can improve teaching considerably. Consequently, this study is guided by the following questions:

1- What are the evaluators perception regarding the purposes, standards, and procedures of teacher evaluation in Oman?

2- What are the factors that influence the evaluators' perceptions regarding the implementation of teacher evaluation system?

B.THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Educators around the world concern about the quality of teaching practiced in the classroom. They believe that, to a large extent, the quality of education in schools depends on the quality of teacher professional learning opportunities available (Darling-Hammond et al.[5], Fullan [6], and Gunter [7]). Teacher evaluation has potential to uphold

teacher professional development, which, subsequently, reflects on students' achievement. Most authors identify the basic purposes of teacher evaluation as improving practice and ensuring accountability (stronge [8], Danielson & McGreal [4], Shinkfield & Stufflebeam [9], Duke [10].

Teacher evaluation is considered as a powerful data collection instrument that intends to help upper management to identify teachers who need extra or particular support and to help individual teachers improve their schooling performance. As Stronge [8] stated that "At its most fundamental level, teacher evaluation helps teachers identify the need to improve and then serves as a catalyst for accomplishing those desired improvements". School principals, supervisors, and senior teachers can build in many opportunities to assess how teachers are teaching and then use this information to make beneficial changes in instruction. This diagnostic use of assessment to provide feedback to teachers and students over the course of instruction is called formative assessment.

The accountability function, on the other hand, reflects an emphasis on the importance of professional goals, competence and quality performance. Accountability focuses on appraising the success of the educational services provided by the school. This type of assessment called summative evaluation and generally takes place after a period of instruction and requires making a judgment. Indeed, the summative evaluation provides vital information concerning the level of a teacher's classroom performance. The summative evaluation results are employed as well in making decisions pertaining to teachers' careers. It is a valid instrument for making decisions since according to Isoré [11] appraising teachers according to more precise standards can helps in comparing the teachers, performance, which consequently can used in hiring, firing, promotion, as well as promoting teacher professional development opportunities or, under particular conditions, responses to ineffective teachers.

Needless to say that ensuring teaching quality cannot be obtained via an individually concentrating on accountability system. This issue, according to Duke [10] "represents an historic shift from a relatively exclusive focus on individual accountability to a combination of individual accountability and professional development". The promotion of teachers' professional development, involves assisting teachers learn about, reflect on, and advance their performance. The formative stage, in where the focus on the developmental teacher evaluation, suggests the need for unremitting professional development. Appropriate, informative feedback is vital to any improvement efforts. Stronge [8] argues that "if established goals (for both the individual teacher and the

school) are to be achieved, an emphasis on improvement and monitoring of progress toward goal accomplishment is inherent in a sound evaluation system.

A comprehensive teacher evaluation purposes, even when they are precisely formulated cannot by themselves secure sound teacher evaluation procedures. Sound teacher evaluation based on how these purposes being pursued and achieved. It depends on "the professional culture of the school and the district, the degree of respect among and between teachers and administrators, and the commitment of all educators to on-going improvement of practice"[12], It is understandable that the usefulness of any evaluation system is necessarily dependent on the extent of its reliability and validity in collecting data and implementing the process. Classroom observation is an important tool for authentic evaluating some type of teachers' behaviours in their actual site. Yet, it is "a very limited tool for gaining an understanding of teachers' thinking, or for assessing how teachers plan, evaluate and create instructional materials, choose their methods, work with colleagues and parents, evaluate students' needs, or offer feedback to students" Darling-Hammond [1]. Several teacher evaluation tools hold promise in notifying teacher professional development. Peer review, portfolio, action research, and training are some of these tools. Schools can incorporate some or all of these tools into teacher evaluation process Attinello et al.[13], Darling-Hammond [1].

Sound evaluation systems also characterised by employing qualified evaluators in assessing the effectiveness of teaching. That is simply because unless the evaluators know exactly what they are seeking for and are reliable in their ratings, they are not likely to be trustworthy to the teachers. If teachers do not trust the evaluators, there will be no impact of the feedback on them and consequently they do not act on the results of the evaluation. That justifies demands for on-going training and promotion of the evaluators' qualifications. Therefore, those who serve as evaluators have "to become knowledgeable in principles of sound personnel evaluation, performance appraisal techniques, methods of motivating faculties, conflict management, and the law as it applies to evaluation of educational personnel"[9].

Productive teacher evaluation also has a promise advantage in relaying on acceptable incentives system by which rewarding the outstanding teacher and take action regarding the unsatisfactory and defaulter teacher. Indeed, such system motivates the aspect of advancement with teacher performance. It is inspiring the teacher to compete with his or her colleagues seeking improvement in teaching/ learning process. In addition, teacher incentives have an effect on student learning. Lavy [14] found that "teachers' monetary

performance incentives have a significant effect on students' achievements"

The evaluation system also, must figure clear and precise standards for teacher performance. Standards must be formulated in the way that "both educators and their supervisors can reasonably understand the job expectations"[3]. If these standards and criteria are not explicitly delineated but open to individual interpretation, the effectiveness of the end of the evaluation may be making vulnerable.

With considering to the literature regarding teacher evaluation, it is vital to carefully examine, analyze and modify the teacher evaluation system in Oman. Also there is a vital requirement to figure out the perception of the evaluators regarding the evaluation purpose, techniques, procedures and consequences.

C. OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS:

- Standard: In this study means a job responsibility or duty carried out by a teacher.
- Indicator: In this study means a substantial examples of behaviours or attitude that shows the achievement of the desired goals or not.
- Summative evaluation: In this study means an intended, comprehensive process that entails a formal, written assessment then decision of an individual's professional capability and success of teacher performance at a particular time.
- Formative teacher evaluation: In this study means an on-going assessment process aimed to improve the teacher performance and identify his/her strengths and weaknesses. This process conducted through regular classroom visiting or other strategies i.e. portfolio, action research and review.

II. METHODOLOGY

This investigative study was conducted using the qualitative approach. That is because this approach has an ability to provide deep descriptions of peoples' experience of the topic under the study. Given that, other forms of research methods often do not help to investigate deeply into the complexity of a problem. Denzin and Lincoln [15], asserted that qualitative research is multi-method in focus, involving a naturalistic, interpretative, approach to its subject matter and an on-going critique of the politics and methods of post-positivism.

For the purposes of this study, two secondary schools in the Sultanate of Oman were selected as the research site with the nine senior teachers, two supervisors, and three school principals of the selected schools as the respondents.

A. RECORDING AND TRANSCRIBING OF THE INTERVIEWS

While conducting the interviews, the interviews have been digitally-recorded. Immediately after conducting each interview, the researcher prepared a summary of the interview. These summaries contained (a) a short explanation in order to provide a listing of the participant's situation description; and (b) memos were prepared to assist the researcher reflect on the interview.

Later the interviews were transcribed by the researcher. Most of the transcripts then have been given to the participants. Definitely, that allows the participants to review the transcripts and make some corrections, additions and deletions to the transcript if they wish. The transcripts were then returned back to the researcher. He then translated it to English.

D. CONDUCTING THE INTERVIEW:

Semi-structural interviews with the teachers, school principals, and supervisors were the primary mean of collecting data. Moreover, analyses of policy and school documents related to teacher evaluation were utilized in data collection as well.

Each informant was interviewed once; in some cases follow-up interviews were conducted for illustration, confirmation, or requesting more elaboration purposes. Time to time the researcher posed unstructured questions during interviews' sessions in order to gain more in-depth information. All interviews were conducted in Arabic language since it is the formal language in the Sultanate of Oman. All interviews were recorded and transcribed as well. The Arabic transcription then translated to English.

B. ANALYSING THE DATA

The data analysed via NVivo9, a Qualitative Data Analysis (QDA) computer software package produced by QSR International. This computer program was very helpful in managing, coding, and analysing the qualitative data. The coding scheme was developed based on the research question. The coded data were then classified to several categories according to the emerging themes.

Data obtained via interviews were verified through the documents collected during the study. Every single case was treated individually and then all seven cases were compared and cross-analysed. Cross-case analysis of the interview data of all the fourteen participants is a key element of the research design. The main purposes of cross-case analysis according to Yin [16] are: "(1) to summarize the extent and types of transformation in the individual cases; and (2) to analyse the driving forces that produced transformation among the [cases]".

The small number of the informants limited the study from generalization. However, data collected and finding obtained are adequate to indicate the situation of the implementation of teacher evaluation in the Sultanate of Oman. Moreover, it is adequate to consider the sort of obstacles and impede the evaluation system in reaching its admirable goals.

III.   5.FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The data distilled from this study revealed some important themes related to teacher evaluation in Oman as follows: The initial interviews indicated that the participants appreciate the teacher evaluation as lever for promoting the education in Oman. They deemed that the evaluators provide an admirable assistance to teacher in their performance. But they have several reservations regarding the implementation process of teacher evaluation.

Research Question 1: The Purposes, Standards, and Procedures of Teacher Evaluation

The first research question deals with evaluators' perception of the objectives of teacher evaluation. The interviews believed that teacher evaluation has aspiration purposes regarding teacher performance. In essence, the evaluators have the consciences that the primary purpose of teacher evaluation is to enhance teacher performance, as one of the school principal of a second cycle school expressed the goal said: "it is to improve the teaching and learning processes". Also it is aimed to ensure teacher and school accountability, since students' achievement is perceived as the heart of the objectives of teacher evaluation in the Sultanate. One senior teacher who was involved in teacher evaluation said "the main purpose of teacher evaluation is to ensure that the teacher performs his supposed work and the students learn well".

This finding is compatible with the new paradigm of the role of teacher evaluation as a significant mean of enhancing teacher performance and ensuring accountability (Danielson [17], Danielson [18], Peterson& Peterson [19], Sergiovanni & Starratt [20]). It also aligns with the study of Alghanabousi [21] who found that the instructional leaders in the Sultanate of Oman value the process of teacher evaluation and consider it as a helpful means for assessing teachers and assisting them in fulfilling their duties.

However, in follow up in-depth interviews, cross-questioning, and profound dialogue with them, it was obvious that the evaluators are unsure regarding the achievement of these purposes in the current system as they intended to be. They are sceptical if the evaluation can improve noticeably the teacher professional development. They attribute that to

some factors such as lack of time, confidentiality, and lack of incentives.

Pertaining to the evaluation standards, several involved evaluators emphasize the ambiguity and broadness of the standards allocated to judge teacher performance. They perceived that, these generality and unclearness might lead to misunderstanding and disagreement with the actual meaning of these standards. One supervisor asserts that

There are generalities in some standards such as the standard for "professional development" or "teaching techniques". These phrases are general enough. How would the principal determine whether this teacher has developed professionally or not? What are the indications of that? Writing an article in a magazine or journal on education? Or delivering a lecture on schools for his colleagues? Or improving his teaching standard? How many articles or lectures or books should he read?

This vagueness makes a considerable confusion among both teachers and evaluators alike.   Some interviewees suggest that the evaluation standards are much and difficult to apply during the classroom visit. They explain the toughness of implementing these standards in rating teachers since the difference between each performance level is undefined. In fact, policy makers are ought to endow regular reviews of evaluation standards and criteria involving input from both parties interested with evaluation process such as principals, supervisors, senior teachers and teachers, in order to warrant constant shared understanding of standards and criteria. It is postulates that when the entire education system changed substantially, as it happen in the Omani educational system, it is essential that the evaluation standards be up-dated to reflect those changes.

This perception of the standards by the interviewees is expected in the case that they lack opportunities for participating in developing and reviewing these standards. It may also be ascribed to some other factors stated by some participants such as: these standards weren't built on scientific research results; they are not periodically revised; and other stakeholders beside teachers are also excluded from their development. Involving all stakeholders is important to ensure their support since it "increases the likelihood that they will accept and act upon the change process's products" Stufflebeam, Madaus, and Kellaghan [22] such the school performance, students' achievement, and accountability reports. This situation raises the necessity of full communication between the policy makers, evaluators, and teachers to clarify these ambiguous. This sort of communication is likely to "minimize unintended consequences and maximize organizationally relevant improvement and performance" [8].

Regarding the procedures, the evaluators believed that they were practicing the evaluation systematically and according to teachers' need. Despite that, they stated that classroom observation is the solely source employed in gathering data regarding teacher performance. They don't utilize any other tools such as portfolio, action research, or student achievement in the evaluating of their teachers.

Much relying on classroom observation, with no doubt reduce the validity and dependability of performance evaluation since this strategy is very limited for acquisition of teachers' planning, validity of instructional materials, teachers' cooperation. Properly used of multiple data sources to present a precise evaluation of teacher practice provides a full picture of teacher work than utilizing merely one or two narrow approaches in data gathering (Peterson & Peterson[19], Stronge & Tucker [3], Stronge [8]).

Research Question 2: The Factors that Influence the Evaluators' Perceptions

The second research question states that: What are the factors that influence the evaluators' perceptions regarding the implementation of teacher evaluation system? The analysis of the interview transcriptions and the in-depth dialogue with the interviewees indicated that many factors have an impact of the evaluators' perceptions. These factors include:

Lack of time:

Time is necessary to tie evaluation purposes to implementation of the evaluation process. Evaluators consistently point out that the most challenging factors in implementing teacher evaluation that aimed to promote teacher professional development as well as ensuring accountability is lack of time. This seems to be the case in a variety of schools. Evaluators and teachers alike complain of the large administrative burden on their shoulders which diminish their ability to follow up the teacher regularly. That undoubtedly, impedes evaluators from ensuring teaching quality and hindering them from supervising their teachers and evaluating their progress. A senior teacher explained her situation saying, "I have to teach 12 periods and I have to evaluate 7 teachers, moreover, there are a myriad of administrative duties burden on our shoulders; so how can the senior teacher cope with this situation?". Implementing teacher evaluation effectively is time demands also on the part of school principals and supervisors as well. One supervisor states that:

Time not enough, due to the heavy workload of management duties accumulated for me, such as attention to administrative, financial, social and public relation affairs, in addition to shifts and other managerial affairs.

Despite the fact that, "the Ministry is keen on providing professional support to teachers by recruiting qualified administrators and supervisors to help teachers in performing their duties "Ministry of Education [23], the heavy burden of administrators and supervisors impedes them from doing their work properly. The school principals, supervisors, and senior teachers complain that teacher evaluation is a complicated task and that, in addition to it, they have to do a myriad of unrelated administrative duties.

Effective teacher evaluation policy entails reducing the burden of administrative tasks on the shoulders of teachers and evaluators. Teachers should have adequate time to reflect on their own performance and identify how to improve their classroom practice. As highlighted by Heneman et al [24] "System designers need to carefully review what is required of teachers to minimize burdens". Administrators ought to also reduce the administrative workload for evaluators, especially seeking to provide them with adequate time for nurturing teacher professional growth.

Incentive System:

The incentives in Oman education system ranging between the substantial rewards in the teacher's day to insubstantial rewarded in the variety of occasions in the school. In addition, there are some packages of incentives created by the employee caring department in the Ministry such as some facilities when purchase from certain shops or applying certain services. The Ministry in its pursuing to motivate the teachers created a department called Developing and Professing the Performance Department. The major goal of this department is to encourage teachers to provide good performance via several means substantially or insubstantially.

Despite that, many interviewees are dissatisfied about the incentive system based on performance. According to them, teachers are all treated equally; there is no difference between good and weak performance teacher. As a school principal explains that: "the annual salary bonus is received by all teachers without exception. Similarly, promotion is according to batches determined by the Ministry. For example, the 1994 batch, 1995 batch, 2000 batch and so on. For this reason no one is excluded. Therefore, I would say that the evaluation process in its current form provides few incentives for teachers and evaluators alike".

They feel that this policy leads to teachers getting frustrated and de-motivated, and this leads to poor results by the students. Other school principal said: *"Many a time, I hear teacher lament that, I've worked hard all year, and so what? Both the hardworking and indolent teachers all get the same bonus."*

This shortage of incentives may be attributed to the fact that in Oman decisions regarding employees' promotion, including teachers, are taken based on the Civil Service Law

issued by Royal Decree No. 120/2004. Thus, rewards and sanctions are administered centrally by the Civil Service Ministry. As a result, employees receive promotions according to their efficiency and seniority, i.e., 70% for efficiency and 30% for seniority.

Article (37) and Article (38) from the Civil Service Law state that the teacher can be rewarded by one or two periodical allowances for the distinguished efforts he or she exerted related to teaching. Article (38), for example, states:

Pursuant to a resolution from the unit head and as per the terms and conditions set by the Regulation, the employee may be given incentive bonuses provided that he has provided excellent service, work, research, or suggestions that helped improve work methods, raise performance level, or achieve economy in expenditure.

Thus, according to the law and based on their performance, teachers are eligible to obtain the bonuses. The large number of the ministry's employees may, however, prevent most from receiving them. Since this issue was raised by many interviewees as a significant problem preventing teacher and evaluator from taking teacher evaluation seriously, it necessitates alert consideration by policy designers and implementers in the Ministry.

The Impact of the Evaluation on Teacher Performance:

The literature mainly point out that teachers have a considerable impact in student learning, since they contribute directly and indirectly in achievement. On the other hand, "the literature is more hesitant in demonstrating which teacher aspects are relevant to teacher quality and what is the relative importance of teacher quality *vis-à-vis* other factors that theoretically influence student learning, including family, student and school factors"[11]. Consequently, it is not easy to recognize and assess the consequences of teacher practice on student achievement.

Most of the evaluators believed that they were practicing effectively in advancing teacher classroom practices. They confirm that they organize and conduct to their teachers several activities such as peer observation, workshops and departmental meeting in order to promote teacher performance. They ensure that their teachers adhere to the plans to carry out these activities. An English supervisor asserted that, "I encourage my teachers to attend two workshops presented by teachers in the school. One about assessment techniques and the other was about assessing students speaking".

Few of the evaluators see the teacher evaluation as a routine practice rather than being an objective and effective process that aims at promoting teacher performance and consequently, enhancement of students' achievement. They believe that "the teacher evaluation has a potential for encouraging teachers and enhancing students' achievement but practically, the teacher evaluation process deviated from its main objective, so it is now perceived as a waste of time and resources"(senior teacher).

Failing to link professional development opportunities to the evaluation process is not likely able to advance teacher performance. Consequently, teacher evaluation becomes a routine practice that comes up against distrust, or at best cases, on the part of evaluate (Danielson [18], Milanowski & Heneman [25]). Instructional leaders i.e. school principal, supervisor, senior teacher, and teacher himself are playing the key role in ensuring the success of such link [26].

There are three factors that may contribute to this situation. There are not enough training programs for evaluators. Those that do exist are not well tailored to the evaluators' needs. There is not enough specific training on the evaluation system's purposes, procedures, and strategies. In addition, evaluators and teachers are all heavily burdened with administrative duties that impede them from focusing on the developmental implications of evaluation.

Despite the fact that training receives considerable emphasis in the Ministry's plan, many studies revealed a lack of evaluator training on features of teacher evaluation (Al-Kaifi [27], Al-Lamki [28], Al-Toobi [29], and Rafeet [30]). These studies recommend greater focus on the topics directly related to the actual role of the evaluators. Such topics include classroom observation [27], and preparing classroom feedback reports (Al Lamki [28]). Evaluators should also have sufficient knowledge about principles and methods of teacher evaluation, motivating teachers, and conflict management. Without sufficient training programs for evaluators, the evaluation system will remain incapable of performing its intended function.

IV. CONCLUSION

Teacher evaluation is an important mean for promoting teacher professional development and ensuring teacher accountability. In Oman, several challenges are facing the evaluation system. Teacher evaluation cannot be a productive educational mean unless it is implemented carefully and with considerable attention to all aspects of the evaluation process. Teacher evaluation involves not only the evaluators' mastering or content knowledge and pedagogies understanding but also considering the teachers professional requirements.

Evaluators should possess comprehensive foundation of the evaluation system; its purposes, process, and the expected impacts. Policy makers must also support evaluators in their evaluation duties. Lack of policy makers sustain has the

potential to limit the ability of the evaluators from performing the evaluation as it is intended. The school needs to provide the time, resources and support for the evaluators to do their work effectively. Evaluators in this study mentioned several obstacles they faced during the implementation of the teacher evaluation process.

Lack of time, standards ambiguity, lack of incentives, and the low consequences observed on teacher performance are examples of such problems. Teacher evaluation, if implemented well to be, can be used as a significant tool in assisting teachers to promote their performance and enhance their professional development (Darling-Hammond et al.[5], Goldhaber & Anthony [31], Natriello [32], Stronge [8]).

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