

Improving the Teacher's Evaluation Methods and Tools in Abu Dhabi Schools - Case Study

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The purpose of this study was to find new tools and methods to evaluate teachers' performance rather than the traditional tools and methods used recently and may not be satisfy and fair to the teachers' efforts in their contribution and teaching. A qualitative method as long as conducting several workshops used in this study to collect data. The sample includes 5 supervisors, 5 principals and 10 teachers working in Abu Dhabi schools. Interviews, group discussion and documents review used in data collecting and analyzed in order of trying to find a fair and comprehensive methods for teachers evaluation that would play a vital role in turn to guarantee better teacher performance and therefore high student academic achievements. The results and finding indicates that the recent tools and methods need to improve to cover the components of teaching as process and effectiveness, teachers performance including the international standards-based evaluation of practices, evidence of teachers contributions to their colleagues, schools and students learning, and need to consider teachers professional development and personal improvements as a part of teachers quality same as teaching quality.

Introduction

The evaluation and the professional development of teachers are two important elements in teaching and learning processes. Both are the essential currency all schools have to improve teachers and performance as well as the students' learning, but schools often spend this currency unwisely. Too often, evaluations are a source of tension and conflict especially when teachers' performance is evaluated only in terms of students' achievements and scores, with ignorance to the fact that teachers' evaluation is a mean of teachers' professional development towards better learning environment and thus better student achievement.

The traditional evaluation is based on limited or competing conceptions of teaching, and is often characterized by inaccuracy, lack of support and insufficient training. Teacher evaluation has frequently been used to weed out the poorest performing teachers rather than to hold all teachers accountable or to improve the performance of all teachers. Because of these traditional limits

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on scope and efficacy, teacher evaluation has had a limited impact on teacher performance and thus on the learning process. These evaluation practices stress accountability and frequently are based upon teacher-directed models of learning such as lecture, demonstration, recitation, and modeling designed primarily to transmit knowledge and cognitive skills to students. Evaluation procedures that focus on complying with regimented sets of behaviors do not encourage teachers' involvement in their own self-development or in the development of collaborative school cultures. Therefore, all teachers wish for an evaluation process that focuses on improvement, instead of just uncovering shortcomings and weaknesses. The evaluation process should be directly tied to both the individual goals of teachers and the school's goals.

Although there are multiple goals of teacher evaluation, they are perhaps most often described as either formative or summative in nature. Formative evaluation consists of evaluation practices meant to shape, form, or improve teachers' performances. Clinical supervisors observe teachers, collect data on teaching behavior, organize these data, and share the results in conferences with the teachers being observed. The supervisors' intent is to help teachers improve their practice. In contrast, summative evaluation, as the term implies, has as its aim the development and use of data to inform summary judgments of teachers. A principal observes teachers in action, works with them on committees, and examines their students' work, talks with parents, and the like. These actions, aimed at least in part at obtaining evaluative information about teachers' work, inform the principal's decision to recommend teachers by giving them positive performance reports that would nominate them for higher administrative positions in the future.

That's why there is a need to have another look to the current teacher evaluation systems, tools and methods. There is a must to create new evaluation tools and methods that help teachers address the angles of their weakness in the educational practices and performance so as to help in improving and developing their professional skills in order to be able to meet the educational goals, school goals and teachers' own goals of improving themselves.

Literature Review

A good teacher evaluation scheme must have: 1. Clear purposes, be they to determine good teaching (Scriven 1973), to reassure audiences (Lortie 1975), to acknowledge teacher achievement (Owens 1991) or to support staffing decisions (Lawrence et al 1993, And as many different and varied sources of data as possible (Peterson, Stevens & Ponzio 1998). In addition to the transparency of process and protection from political influences (Peterson 2000, 84).

The educational philosophy in UAE teachers and teaching evaluation states that the evaluation process exists to facilitate the improvement of instruction. The evaluation procedures and associated instruments provide the

framework for assessing teacher performance as it relates to the adopted performance criteria. Through the objective and unbiased application of this process, performance strengths and areas for improvement will be identified. This data will be communicated to the teacher in a constructive way and, through interaction, a professional growth plan will be developed to support and enhance professional development.

Because there are many dimensions to pedagogical work, it is best to use multiple measures involving multiple sources of data to evaluate the quality of teaching and teachers effectiveness as the following:

- Teaching Delivery (including quality, amount, and level of classroom instruction)
- Planning (including development of course materials, course revision, development of new methods and activities)
- Student Assessment (including appropriate level of assignments, exams, grading standards)
- Oversight of Independent Studies, projects, self study, initiatives.
- Support for Student Internships, Experiential Learning, Service Learning
- Colleagues and peers collaboration, Curricular Work (including participation in curriculum revision, efforts to focus on teaching)
- Advising and Mentoring.
- Professional Development and Innovation around Teaching (Hammond, 2012).

(McLaughlin 1990: 404) stated that "In most school districts, the norms and expectations that surround teacher evaluation preclude a meaningful activity."

Screven's (1981) review of summative teacher evaluation provides us with the most comprehensive list of DOs and DON'Ts in teacher evaluation. He states we should: 1. Evaluate administrators. 2. Evaluate all the roles of the teacher, not just their classroom practice. 3. Distinguish between the teacher's worth to the school and the value of their teaching. 4. Provide an independent support system for teachers being evaluated. 5. Involve students. 6. Look at course content.

Wolf (1973: 160) stated that "Teachers see nothing to be gained from evaluation.". Teachers "regard the practice as an institutional obligation to be endured rather than an opportunity to be seized." (Johnson 1990: 266). If a school can justify evaluating all teachers through identical procedures, then the school is probably devoid of innovations." (Travers, 1981: 22).

(Good & Mulryan 1990) said that it's hardly surprising when you consider that most current practice is based on a principal or supervisor report which in turn is based on a classroom visit (Bridges 1992, Peterson & Chenoweth 1992, Lewis 1982) or a checklist of what good teaching should involve.

(Peterson 2000: ix) stated that "Few educational researchers and developers have worked on the evaluation of teachers, who, after all, are the

key performers of the curriculum and the classroom... Poor practice in teacher evaluation is quietly accepted, according to teachers, administrators, and researchers."

Questions and Hypotheses

- Q1: what are the current methods used in evaluating teachers' performance?

H2: There are traditional methods of supervisors observing teaching styles at classroom and evaluations that are based on students academic achievements.

- Q2: How can the teachers' professional development help in getting positive evaluations of teachers?

H2: There is a great need to design professional training programs that address the weakness points of teachers' performance and aim at helping teachers to get positive evaluations.

- Q3: How can teachers help in creating new methods and tools of evaluation with regards to some chosen areas for improving?

H3: The best evaluation tools and methods can be generated through teachers discussing with the school administrators and supervisors the chosen areas of improvement as well as the right criteria with which they are evaluated fairly.

- Q4: How is teacher evaluation linked to teachers' professional development?

H4: teacher evaluation should be a mean of improving teachers' skills through professional development by addressing the needed areas to be developed not a mean of digging up teachers' mistakes through providing a negative feedback and evaluation report.

Methodology

The researcher used qualitative method; start with review literature and meet the teachers from different schools in order to conceptualize the problem based on teacher's perspectives. The resulting data is usually transcribed then analyzed using one of a variety of techniques for analysis (development [and interpretation] on key themes for example). The two main methods used of data collection that were used by the researcher in this study are: Focus Groups and In-Depth Interviews, interviews are conducted orally, and the answers to the questions are recorded by the researcher, the Focus group conducted with the principals, supervisors and teachers. 5 supervisors, 5 principals and 10 teachers participate in this study.

Research Limitations

The following are limitations of the current study:

- 1- The study is restricted to Abu Dhabi schools in the three cycles (1, 2, and 3) during the first semester of the academic year 2012/2013 in the UAE.
- 2- The study is restricted to Abu Dhabi schools principals, supervisors and teachers.

Data Analysis Methods

The collected qualitative data were analyzed by the researcher. The results, that the researcher obtains from data analyzing, will be used to explain the reality and the necessity to find and create new methods and tools for evaluating teachers. Hopefully, the researcher could provide valuable practical recommendations based on the data gathered and analyzed from the samples to improve the quality of teachers' performance through effective and encouraging evaluation methods and tools for teachers.

Findings and Discussion

Interview Results with the Teachers

Current Evaluation Methods

All of the participant teachers gave the same tools that are the base of the evaluating system of teachers in AD schools. Teachers are being evaluated based on several criteria that depend on the following:

- Teachers' lessons plan.
- Classroom observations.
- Teachers' portfolios, and students' work samples.
- Students' achievement records and data.

In the educational field, lessons' plans are considered windows into the level of preparation the teacher has to deliver and teach the lesson's content and objectives, and to manage classroom learning environment. No one can deny that lessons' plans are an important aspect of teaching and learning as it is attached to student learning. That is because students' learning is affected by the level of planning that links the learning objectives to the teaching activities, but it's important to remember that, as one of the teachers stated: *"the lesson plan is just a plan, and once it is implemented in one class, it may need to be adjusted according to teacher's observation in the class, or adjusted to other class according to students' level of understanding, and learning abilities.*

That's why the idea of how the teachers implement the plan in the class cannot be used as a main evaluation factor to evaluate teachers."

As for the classroom observation, it is considered the most commonly used tool for evaluating teachers. Classroom observations do serve to capture a good background and collect some information about teacher's instructional practices in the classroom, and can be used in both summative and informative evaluation to track the teacher's growth and level of improvement, and also can identify the professional development areas needed for each teacher, but all of the interviewed teachers agreed that this tool of evaluation cannot be always trusted as a valid one, and they mentioned some reasons related to their judgment such as evaluator's bad mood, evaluator's personality or nature of relationship with the teachers, or because the evaluator sometimes is poorly trained or new into the field of evaluation. Another reason provided by the teachers that assures the fact of classroom observations not to be reliable is that it is done not more than 2 times a year, and that brief observation is subject to biased results and evaluations, so it is not reliable.

When it comes to students' academic achievement levels such as test scores, one of the interviewed teachers said that: *"evaluators see that it helps to identify teachers' level of performance on students' learning, but these tests are not enough because they evaluate a certain part in the curriculum that may was difficult or easy on the students, and accordingly their results and scores come out that way."*

Evaluators

Teachers were asked about who are the best ones to evaluate teachers' performance from their point of view. The most common evaluators are the principals and the supervisors as the teachers answered. But two of the teachers think that there is no logical reason why the principal is engaged in evaluating teacher's performance if they don't really have a background or knowledge of the curriculum or the subject being taught or its scientific ways of teaching its contents. They stated that: *"principals not having enough background of the subject can't really give reliable and valid evaluation on teacher's performance because teachers' performance is highly related to the different techniques of teaching different subjects. We need evaluator who have good knowledge of the subject we teach, its curriculum and content, so they can give us professional advice and comments to improve ourselves, and who can identify the real weaknesses in our performance."*

Frequencies of Evaluation

All teachers said that: *"we are evaluated by the supervisor once or twice a year in addition to principal's visits to evaluate us during a classroom time. That's it. To be honest, we don't want more than that, because as I told you the evaluation tools are not fair to us and supervisors and principals' visit to evaluate us is considered by most of the teachers as a nightmare that has a beginning and an ending."* The rest of the teachers agreed on that when the researcher mentioned that answer, but also stated that the number of times the

teacher is evaluated is a chance for a better evaluation and a good chance to track the progress and improvement in teachers' performance in several areas of teaching. A teacher suggested that *"in order to help evaluators to keep track of teachers' progress so the evaluation report would be fair and reliable, it is better to evaluate teachers from four to five times a year."*

Teacher's Evaluation and Professional Development

Teachers emphasized on the fact of the lack of professional development programs dedicated to teachers of different subjects. Most of the teachers ensured that the main target and goal of the teacher evaluation is to improve teachers' teaching styles and performance and to identify the weaknesses areas in order to receive a good related training, but unfortunately *"few of the evaluators bare this in mind. Most of the evaluators just come to do their job that is presenting the evaluation report they are responsible for, and some of them think that evaluating teacher is just to look for the wrong practices of teachers, addressing them and write them in the report. And because evaluators visit us for just one or two times a year, they are not able to keep track of our progress in the weak areas. In addition to all that, we need new policies related to relating professional development programs with the evaluation. All we got from the evaluation is a report with the mistakes and wrong practices we made, and some pieces of advice on how to avoid them and that's it."*

Teachers' Concerns with regard to Teachers' Evaluation

Teachers stated that evaluation process is not really productive as teachers don't have any input into the evaluation criteria. This leads teachers to distrust the evaluation process and to question the validity of the results it produces.

Another concern is that evaluators don't spend enough time on the evaluation. In other words, teachers complain that the principal, or the supervisor who is conducting the evaluation, does not have the time to gather quality information and provide useful feedback.

Another complain from the teachers is that the results of the evaluations are not really used to further teacher development. for many teachers, the evaluation process and results can be a dead end to them as it frustrate them and disappoint them, especially if they are working hard to do their jobs.

Workshops and Group Discussion

Workshops with principals and supervisors resulted in good recommendations and generated useful related topics and thoughts about teacher evaluation methods and tools used in AD schools. Both principals and supervisors agreed on the need to design new evaluation system that is highly connected to the professional development of teachers in order to achieve the goals of evaluation and to translate the purpose of it into reality.

The researcher conducted a focus group with the principals and the supervisors and headed the sessions by posing the questions related to teacher

evaluation methods that need to be reconsidered. Many thoughts and ideas were exchanged and used in the recommendations for designing a new suggested evaluation system or improving the current existed one.

The researcher started the session with a question of "what is an effective teacher evaluation, in your point of view? Participant discussed and shared their ideas and experiences. Among the answers to the above question were: "A teacher evaluation system should give teachers useful feedback on classroom needs so he can work on improving the techniques that matches those needs." A participant supervisor said that the teacher evaluation process is "considered as an opportunity to learn new teaching techniques, and counsel from principals and supervisors on how to make changes in their classrooms to better teaching and learning process". A question from the researcher was asked to know about the standards and procedures to be set by the evaluators when evaluating the teachers. Supervisors agreed on the fact that the standards should be related to important teaching skills, to be objective, to be clearly communicated to the teacher before the evaluation begins and be reviewed after the evaluation is over, and be linked to the teacher's professional development.

Participants were asked whether these standards are followed honestly or are there any obstacles that make it difficult on them to follow these standards. A principal replied by saying that "*the evaluators do follow these standards but there are some factors that may not help them implement it in the right way.*" Asking about examples of these factors resulted in supervisors giving some instances like assigning one supervisor for almost ten to twelve or more teachers to be evaluated by that one supervisor in a limited time. This is a big challenge that drains out the supervisor who is responsible for evaluating those teachers.

Supervisors shed the light on the need to increasing the frequency of evaluating times and visits in order to be able to give an accurate feedback and evaluation result. But due to the fact of being assigned to a big number of teachers in different schools that are located in different areas makes it difficult to achieve that.

A question of "Do you think that classroom observations and lessons' plans are good signs of well skillful teachers, are they enough to be used to evaluate teachers?" A principal stated that "*Observing classroom activities is the most common form of data collection for teacher evaluation.*" He added that *the goal of class observations is to obtain a representative sample of teacher's performance in the classroom.* However, evaluators cannot accomplish this goal with a sample of only a few hours of observation or with an observation of only one class. One of the supervisors suggested that observations can be formal and planned or informal and unannounced. Both forms of evaluation can provide valuable information. As for reviewing lessons' plans, supervisors commented that lesson plans can reflect how well a teacher has thought through instructional goals, and when reviewing classroom records, such as tests and assignments, an evaluator can have an indication on how well a teacher has linked lesson plans, instruction, and testing.

Workshop participants were asked about what they think of the relationship between teacher evaluation and teacher professional development. All of the participants agreed the teacher evaluation is a tool that helps to identify the professional development needs of teachers. However, one of the supervisors said that it's very difficult to link professional development to teacher evaluation in a practical way because no policy is existed yet to provide and facilitate engaging teachers in professional development programs especially among the big load and responsibilities on teachers' shoulders with regard to the heavy curriculum and extra activities.

Instead, supervisors suggested that in current situation of no policy to support or link teacher professional development with teacher evaluation, they see that evaluation can be used to work with teachers to set specific, achievable goals; and to provide constructive criticism and suggestions to improve weak areas and amplify strengths; as well as asking for the help of experienced teachers to help improve the performance of less experienced teachers.

To keep the discussion going, the researcher raised the issue of evaluation criteria by stating that the development obstacles of teacher evaluation methods is being begin with the fundamental consideration which is: evaluation of what? What are the criteria used to determine the teacher quality? Is it only about evaluating the teaching/learning/assessment results of students? Yet we know that the teaching methods and techniques of a mathematics teacher differ from those of a music or English teachers. Are there generic characteristics peculiar to all "good" teachers? A quick answer came from one of the supervisors who said that *the criteria for evaluation must include intangible and tangible teaching aspects*. Intangible aspects include student rapport and social responsibility while tangible aspects comprise well-written lesson plans and test scores. The wide range of suggested criteria for evaluating teachers has resulted in numerous methods designed to quantify those criteria. Other participant added that *"the most important characteristic for any successful evaluation method is validity - whether a test or procedure measures what it purports to measure*. It becomes inappropriate, meaningless, and useless to make specific inferences from invalid measurements. Evidence of validity must be accumulated to support inferences made from evaluation results".

The last question to be asked by the researcher in the workshop sessions was "what are the elements of successful evaluation process from your point of view?" Different elements were given to the researcher by the participants in the workshop. These elements included that evaluation procedures must address teachers', students' needs, procedures must be consistent with the stated purposes for evaluation, resources must be used efficiently to achieve reliability, validity, and cost-effectiveness, and finally, teachers should be involved in developing evaluation procedures.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Result shows that there is a critical link between an effective teaching and students' academic achievement. Many studies showed that good teachers don't contribute positively, more than other less experienced or less skilled teachers, to their students' academic growth. That's why policy makers in the educational field should show more interest to better understand the effective teaching practices that leads to strong educational improvement and development. This is considered to be a challenging mission to address how to reliably measure teachers' performance with the goal of improving it, instead of frustrating or disappointing teachers, then getting the undesired results on the learning process. The teacher evaluation process in most of AD schools still follow the traditional teacher evaluation methods with no creativity, or initiatives by the evaluators to improve it to be aligned with the new trends and concepts of education reforms and improvements. It is obvious that the evaluation system being adapted in AD schools is not encouraging and not linking teacher evaluation process to teachers' professional development. Not to mention the need to more efforts from the educational authority to organize and make these professional development opportunities available for teachers. As well as giving more authority to the principals, supervisors, evaluators and teachers to come up with a well-planned evaluation process that takes into consideration the teachers' professional development needs. The participants agree that the following describe the recent evaluation system:

- Evaluations done only once or at best circumstances twice a year for each teacher.
- There are guidelines or personal trends of principals and supervisors, who are the evaluators, to differentiate evaluation frequencies, which are the times of visits to evaluate, by teachers' experience. In other words, experienced teachers are not the core interest of evaluators, because they think they don't need evaluation.
- The most common evaluation method adapted in evaluating teachers in AD schools is the classroom observation (both scheduled and unannounced).
- Teachers are evaluated in terms of teaching styles, the ability to deliver the content of the lesson, lessons' plans, and classroom management skills.
- No regulation found in the evaluation system that requires teachers' professional development opportunities according to the weaknesses and the evaluation report results, or anything related to training evaluators themselves as a tool to improve their evaluation skills and knowledge to be exposed to the new concepts of educational evaluation.
- Most of the evaluators' reports are not valid and not reliable from the point of view of teachers, and that's because of some factors

like the evaluation frequencies, evaluators' background of the subject and the techniques of teaching it, short evaluation time, and not giving the teachers the chance to or the opportunity to give their input regarding the evaluation methods and tools, to identify what is the best method and tool to be used as an evaluation tool so the results would be more reliable and valid.

- Evaluators themselves are not really given the opportunity to give their input with regard to improving the evaluation process. Instead, they are given load of work of evaluation to a big number of teachers in different schools that are located in different areas, which makes it difficult for them to evaluate properly, fairly and give reliable evaluation results.

This leads us to the fact of the need to come up or design new evaluation system with new policies that serve the real purpose of the process of teacher evaluation, and thus serves teachers, students and schools at the same time. The following recommendations can help policymakers:

1. Define the standards of qualified teachers. In other words, educational authority should define the academic standards for what a qualified teacher needs to have in terms of qualifications, skills and knowledge to be considered as a qualified teacher.
2. The evaluation system should focus mainly on improving teaching practice. This means that evaluation should be view easing informational tool to help evaluators and principals to identify teachers who need additional or specialized assistance and to help individual teachers improve their instructional practices.
3. Evaluators should be trained in order to conduct more accurate and effective evaluation of teachers. Training might focus on skills such as analyzing effective teaching practice, determining a teacher's impact on student learning, and providing leadership for professional development.
4. Educational authority should widen the participation in designing the evaluation policy or system. A specialized committee can reformed including teachers, principals and supervisors to design a teacher evaluation system by adding improvements or design new tools in terms of implementing it and in terms of applying the evaluation results.
5. Teachers and principals should have a good understanding to the evaluation system and regulations before implementing it. This will guarantee confidence and evaluation system's long- term sustainability.
6. Teacher evaluation should be linked to teacher professional development. Teachers should receive professional development

sessions according to the evaluation report that identifies the teacher's needs.

7. A communication action plan should be developed by the educational authority to ensure that the evaluation system is matching teachers' needs as well as giving detailed information of the applied evaluation system to make it clear for all about the standards to be followed. This communication action plan will serve to gauge teachers concerns and perceptions of the evaluation system being implemented.

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