

Secondary School Teachers' Perceptions of Purposes of Performance Appraisal. A Case of Selected Schools in Bungoma County, Kenya

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Abstract – This study explored secondary school teachers' perceptions of the purposes of performance appraisal in the context of the implementation of a new appraisal system. The study was conducted in selected schools within Bungoma County, Kenya. The exploratory case study design was used. Data was collected using qualitative methods: document analysis field notes, focus group and semi-structured interviews. The sample size comprised of 24 teachers from six secondary schools. Two focus group interviews were conducted each with 12 participants. For the semi-structured interviews, 12 teachers were sampled. Stratified, simple random and purposive samplings were used to select participating schools and the study sample. All interviews were audio-taped and transcribed. Thematic coding was used to analyze the data. Findings indicate that teachers perceived accountability to be the major purpose of the new performance appraisal system. Emphasis was not laid on the improvement purpose by the employer because teachers were yet to receive feedback from the employer almost two years after the introduction of the new system. In addition, participants felt their employer did not accord them the necessary support and opportunities to attend professional development programs. Respondents also had minimal understanding of professional development and its importance in the teaching profession. It is recommended that Teachers Service Commission provides continuing professional development programs and supports teachers to attend them.

Keywords – Secondary School Teachers, Perceptions, Purposes, Performance Appraisal.

I. INTRODUCTION

Performance appraisal is any procedure that involves setting work standards, assessing employees' actual performance relative to standards set, providing feedback with the aim of motivating, eliminating performance deficits and reinforcing exceptional performance [1]. Employee performance appraisal is the basis of salary increment, promotion and other rewards, it shows the weaknesses and strengths of employees and so highlights areas for improvement and management can make other decisions like an employee layoff, penalties, and employee development [2]. The functions of performance appraisal in any organization can be summed up into two: improvement and accountability.

Teacher appraisal has been considered a key element in reforms worldwide in order to foster teacher professional development and to improve the quality of education [3]. Without capable, high quality teachers in classrooms, no

educational reform effort can easily succeed [4]. Appropriate appraisal schemes have the potential to improve the professionalization of teaching, the effective management of schools, the quality of education provided for students, the effectiveness of teachers as well as satisfying legitimate demands of accountability [5].

Within the performance appraisal process, standards have to be set. It is against these standards that employees are evaluated. In performance appraisal, standards provide scope for teachers and school leaders to make informed decisions about teaching and may assist in identifying future areas for growth and development [6].

Teacher performance appraisal has been in existence in Kenya since early 1960s. However, it was not until 2016 that the term performance appraisal was introduced by Teachers Service Commission to all its employees. Before 2016, it was simply referred to as teacher assessment and it was carried out by quality assurance officers. The former teacher appraisal was guided by the "Quality Index: Guidelines for Quality Assurance and Standards Assessment of Schools in Kenya (2010)," prepared by the directorate of quality assurance and standards, Ministry of Education. In the quality index, there were six items for the assessors. These included: leadership, management and community involvement; curriculum organization and implementation; teaching, learning and assessment; student progression and achievement; student welfare; and infrastructure and school facilities. Each of these six areas had indicators/sources of evidence. For example in curriculum organization and implementation, the sources of evidence were: curriculum documents, timetables, schemes of work, classroom observations, staff meeting files, lesson plans, minutes of staff meetings/subject panels, meeting with teaching staff, departmental meetings, etc.

In the previous appraisal, assessors sampled only a few schools and this meant not all teachers were appraised. In Kenya and other developing countries, unsystematic appraisal has long flourished (covertly and unfairly) based on impulse, prejudice and incorrect and inadequate data [7]. Teacher appraisal policies and practices at Kenyan secondary schools at that time, exhibited weaknesses, which needed to be addressed if teacher appraisal was to be used to improve the quality of teaching and education [7].

A new teacher appraisal policy was introduced in early 2016. Teachers Service Commission (TSC) introduced the two performance management tools (performance contracting and teacher appraisal reforms) in January 2016 to enhance the quality of teaching and ultimately improve

learning in primary, and secondary schools and tertiary institutions. According to Teachers Service Commission, the purpose of the appraisal is to review and improve teaching standards through a systematic appraisal approach, with a view to evaluate teachers' performance and professional development [8].

The purpose of the new appraisal system is clear from TSC point of view but what do teachers think is the purpose of the appraisal? This study sought to answer this question. Findings from this study provide feedback on the perceptions of teachers about the purposes of the new appraisal policy. This is significant to the TSC because it will help in addressing the challenge of negative perceptions and attitudes inherent in teachers as expressed by representatives of the unions. Teachers' perceptions of the appraisal system influence the ways in which it is put into place [9].

II. METHODS AND PROCESS

This was an exploratory case study which solely used qualitative methods. Data was collected using document analysis (Teacher Performance Appraisal and Development tool), field notes, focus group and semi-structured interviews. The sample size was 24 secondary school teachers from 8 schools in Bungoma County, Kenya. Two focus groups were conducted each with six teachers, total: 12 teachers. For semi-structured interviews, 12 teachers were interviewed four from each category of schools. The researcher used the current Ministry of Education classification of schools i.e. national, extra-county, county and sub-county. Three types of sampling were used. First was stratified sampling. Each category of schools formed a stratum. Second was random sampling. Within each

stratum, simple random sampling was used to select participating schools. Lastly was purposive sampling. This was used to select respondents. The criteria for selecting teachers included: age, gender, employer, teaching subjects, teaching experience and type of school.

The focus groups were conducted in two schools at a time and day when all the six teachers were available and not occupied with lessons. The researcher served as the moderator. The researcher started with introduction and later on asked questions in order of complexity. Simple questions were asked first and gradually the complexity of questions increased. Both interviews were audio-taped with the respondents' permission. The focus group interviews lasted for an average of one and a half hours. Every interview was transcribed and coded immediately after. The codes were compared and cross-cutting themes identified.

After the focus-group interviews, the semi-structured interviews with individual teachers followed. The interview guide was informed by the data from the focus group discussions. The purpose was to explore more deeply the themes that emerged from the focus groups from an individual's perspective. The interviews lasted on average 45 minutes. They took place in one of the rooms in the school. All interviews were transcribed individually i.e. adjustments were made on the next interview. Both vertical and horizontal analyses were done. Participation in both the semi-structured and focus group discussion was on voluntary basis. The respondents were assured of anonymity and confidentiality of their responses. They were allowed to choose pseudo names.

In relation to validity and reliability, the following measures were used: pilot study, triangulation, member checks, peer-review of the interview guide, audit trail and rich description.

Table I. Demographic Details of Participants

Respondent	Sex	Age	Subjects	Experience (Years)	Type of School
Pendo	Female	51	Agriculture/Biology	27	County
Wanyama	Male	52	Business Studies	26	Sub-County
Nekesa	Female	28	Chemistry/Biology	02	Sub-county
Wandili	Male	31	Geography/Kiswahili	3 weeks	Sub-County
Mwende	Female	25	Business Studies	01	County
Nasimiyu	Female	43	English/French	15	County
Welime	Male	49	Kiswahili/CRE	23	Extra county
Nafuna	Female	38	French	12	Extra-County
Sikuku	Male	27	Computer	01	Extra-County
Kharobo	Female	38	English/Literature	13	National
Waswa	Male	55	Geography/History	28	National
Nafula	Female	48	Maths/ Chemistry	17	National

III. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Two major purposes of teacher performance appraisal emerged from both the focus group and semi-structured interviews. These were: professional development (formative) and accountability (summative). However, respondents felt accountability was the major function of the appraisal. Some respondents were not clear about the purpose of the new appraisal system as they were yet to get

feedback from the employer. The effective monitoring and evaluation of teaching is central to the continuous improvement of the effectiveness of teaching in a school. It is essential to know the strengths of teachers and those aspects of their practice which could be further developed [10]. From this perspective, the institution of teacher evaluation is a vital step in the drive to improve effectiveness of teaching and learning and to raise educational standards.

i). Accountability

It is clearly stated on the Teacher Performance Appraisal and Development tool that the purpose of the appraisal is to review and improve teaching standards through a systematic appraisal approach, with a view to evaluate teachers' performance and promote professional development. The results from the performance appraisals are to be used for promotion; deployment and other rewards as may be described; identifying training needs and taking correctional measures in cases of unsatisfactory performance. The objectives of the appraisal are to: provide quality education to learners in all public institutions; give teachers an opportunity to improve on their performance competencies; analyze teachers' performance gaps and provide support for professional development; maintain cumulative records of teaching and learning performance for decision making; and provide for fair, effective and consistent teacher evaluation. The results of the performance appraisal are used for purposes of promotion, deployment and other rewards as may be described (Regulation 52 of the Code of Regulations for Teachers, 2015).

Respondents felt the new performance appraisal system was mainly for accountability (summative). This because they had not received any feedback on the appraisal reports they submit at the end of the term. The performance gaps they identified had not yet been acted upon and so they believed the appraisal was not for improvement purposes. Here is what some participants said: "...it is mostly for accountability. At the end of it all, not everybody can be promoted. It is about accounting for tax payers' money and time..." (Ms. Pendo). Another teacher, Mr. Sikuku, was skeptical about the professional development dimension of the appraisal. He said: "...Teachers Service Commission is using the performance appraisal for accountability and decision making. Professional development has not been forthcoming and I don't think it will..."

Mr. Waswa was not quite clear about the purpose of the appraisal. What was written down in the policy paper was not what was happening on the ground. He said;

"...The purpose might be there but just in writing. This is because according to Teachers Service Commission, they want to know teachers' weaknesses so that they can help in improvement. Maybe that is the purpose but I have not seen it happening. Maybe until we see the feedback, it is when we shall know the intention..." (Mr. Waswa).

To other respondents, the performance appraisal served as a monitoring tool. It serves to ensure the teacher has all the required professional documents. They also made the work of teachers in administrative positions easier (principals and their deputies). Here are some excerpts:

"...The appraisal was introduced to monitor teachers. It reminds teachers to update their records of work...makes the deputy's work easier..." (Ms. Nasimiyu).

"...Teachers Service Commission wants to check what you are doing while in the office in Nairobi. But I don't know whether they go through all the documents we send..." (Mr. Welime).

"...The appraisal monitors more the compliance to rules of the teaching profession i.e. what I am supposed to be

having as a teacher..." (Ms. Kharobo).

ii). Professional Development

Professional development is the sum total of formal and informal learning pursued and experienced by the teacher in a compelling learning environment under conditions of complexity and dynamic change^[11]. The Kenyan teacher just like other teachers across the world needs to continuously update his/her skills and knowledge. There are numerous changes taking place in the environment that make it mandatory for teachers to engage in lifelong learning. These include; technology (e-learning, online simulation, gamification), pedagogy and curriculum and the increasing diversity of students^[12].

Improvement was one of the functions of the new performance appraisal according to Teachers Service Commission. However, very few teachers felt that the current appraisal system was meeting this purpose. Teachers Service Commission had not delivered on this function. Emphasis was laid on having the professional documents and submitting appraisal reports on time. Some respondents found the feedback from their colleagues after lesson observation to be useful in improving instructional practice. During the discussions, it was evident that few teachers understood what professional development was and why they needed continuous professional development. Majority of respondents felt that professional development was only necessary for language teachers. This is because language set books changed regularly and hence teachers needed to be briefed about the new books. Professional development was not a common discourse among the teachers. Similarly were the concepts of reflection and collaboration (communities of practice; study groups; peer coaching, observation and mentoring) as methods of improvement. The teachers seemed individualistic/isolated in performing their duties.

Respondents felt that because the new appraisal relied only on peer and self-appraisal, then the improvement purpose was difficult to come by. It was also difficult to reflect on their practice because of limited time. This is what respondents said;

"...If the bosses would come on the ground and see to it that what we are doing is what is required, then it would be effective..." (Ms. Mwendu).

"...The feedback given can be of great use to me. You can know the areas to correct and the ones to maintain..." (Mr. Wandili).

"...The appraisal has made me more aware of my strengths and weaknesses, for example documentation. With the appraisal, I update my records regularly. It is a condition I must do it..." (Mr. Wanyama).

"...Whenever I am filling in the appraisal tool, I am quick to say lesson well covered. I really do not want to reflect, I am interested in completing the task and embarking on something else..." (Ms. Pendo).

Professional development is most effective if it challenges teachers regarding their conceptions of student capabilities or focuses on approaches to teaching specific parts of the curriculum; occurs over time; focuses on methods to improve student outcomes; engages teachers in a professional community of practice; and when school

leaders support teachers opportunities to learn and to process new information and then offered relevant expertise [13]. In the new appraisal policy, teachers are relying on comments from their peers for improvement. This alone is not enough because some of the appraisers are inexperienced, were not properly trained and hence lack the necessary skills and competences. As one teacher said; "...someone comes to observe you because they are in charge of you but are not knowledgeable in the field. The intended outcome may not be achieved..." (Mr. Waswa).

To Ms. Nasimiyu, her employer hardly provided professional development opportunities, financial support and time; "...Teachers Service Commission does not give teachers time and money for professional development..." (Ms. Nasimiyu).

Teacher appraisal has been considered a key element in reforms worldwide in order to foster teacher professional development and to improve the quality of education [3]. The manner in which the new appraisal is being implemented in Kenya leaves many unanswered questions as to if it is really doing much to help teachers in terms of professional development. Performance appraisal is an ongoing process used for identifying, measuring and developing an individual's performance in accordance with an organization's strategic goals [14]. Teachers are encouraged to work together, to collaboratively solve problems of practice (in much the same way that constructivist teaching engages students in the classroom). Whether in teacher networks or study groups, grade level teams or professional development schools, there is a focus on creating a community of learners in which there is 'a shift from teaching in isolation and one-on-one mentoring to school-wide collaboration and conversation' [15].

Professional development improves the quality of teachers. The effective monitoring and evaluation of teaching is central to the continuous improvement of instructional practices in a school. It is essential to know the strengths of teachers and those aspects of their practice which could be further developed. From this perspective, the institution of teacher evaluation is a vital step in the drive to improve effectiveness of teaching and learning and to raise educational standards [10].

IV. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It is evident that the new performance appraisal policy whose implementation started in 2016 is more on accountability and less on the improvement/professional development purpose. This study therefore makes the following recommendations:

- Professional needs assessment to be done at school level in order to offer differentiated professional development programs.
- Teachers Service Commission to liaise with the Ministry of Education in order to provide continuous professional development for teachers.
- Teachers Service Commission to provide feedback to teachers on the appraisal reports they send.
- Teachers to be oriented on professional development, its purpose, methods and the various levels at which it

occurs.

- Teachers Service Commission should provide external reinforcement during appraisals in order to produce objective reports.

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