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## Is appraisal system a threat for teachers?

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### Abstract

A perceived lack of motivation and a dissatisfaction among English language teachers together with the evidence of failure rates in English proficiency tests within the School of Foreign Languages signaled a need for change. This study covers the planning, implementation and evaluation of the first comprehensive appraisal system, which allowed staff an opportunity to reflect on their feelings about the programs, examinations, expectations and the administrative issues through the questionnaires and interviews. The feedback given by the staff and the students created a series of changes at school; including the establishment of Curriculum and Material Development, and a review of approaches in the Teacher Development Unit and Testing Units.

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### 1. Introduction

Performance appraisal and evaluation is identified as the identification, measurement and management of human performance in organizations and provides individuals with useful feedback and coaches them to higher levels of performance (Gomez-Mejia, Balkin, and Cardy, 2007). The studies use the terms “performance evaluation” and “performance appraisal” interchangeably, stating performance appraisals are a systematic way of evaluating the standard of a worker’s performance (Grote, 2002). According to Rebore (1991) and McGreal (1983) the performance evaluation system in a school is designed for three purposes: 1- to improve teachers’ job satisfaction and morale, thus teachers become aware that administration is interested in their job progress and personal development; 2- to provide an opportunity for each teacher to discuss job problems and interests with his/her supervisor; 3- to assemble substantiating data for use as a guide for promotions, disciplinary action, and termination, retention, tenure.

It is indicated in several studies that performance evaluation not only shapes the approach of the administration in terms of how to run a school but also safeguards and improves the quality of instruction received by students accordingly (Kremer, 1988; Gomez-Mejia, Balkin, and Cardy, 2007). However, in order to make performance appraisal a true benefit for administration and to develop teachers in the system, research suggest that the process should be well-structured and planned (Bernardin et. all, 1996). For a well-structured evaluation/appraisal process,

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studies indicate that teachers should have a clear understanding of the performance appraisal process and how performance will be measured. Thus, the first step is to identify the dimensions of performance that determine effective job performance and the goals related to the core responsibilities defined in teachers' job descriptions, which may cover traits, behaviors, and task outcomes (Gomez-Mejia, and Cardy, 2007). Studies related to teacher evaluation indicate that fair, non-threatening, valid, and comprehensive evaluation systems offer an opportunity to learn and develop for both the individual and the school by meeting the prime aim of evaluation (Bernardin et. all, 1996). For an effective teacher evaluation, the following are suggested:

- sticking with facts: Evaluation should be based on facts not rumor or gossip,
- seeing for yourself: Information should be collected from different sources such as students, other teachers,
- being honest and confidential: Effective evaluation should depend on trust and evaluation feedback should be shared in private by the evaluator and the person being evaluated,
- focusing on issues not people: The goal of evaluation should be to improve performance rather than to criticize individual teachers,
- conducting observations correctly: Planning classroom visits, taking accurate notes, rather than merely limiting evaluations to ratings, and conducting post-evaluation conferences properly (Daresh, 1992).

Finally, studies emphasize that an appraisal system developed jointly between administration, supervisors and teachers themselves has a better chance of incorporating diverse but relevant points of view than a system developed by top management alone (Hickcox et al. 1988).

Although the studies mentioned above suggest that teacher evaluation has positive effects, some studies suggest that teacher evaluation can bring serious problems which pose a threat to the well-being of professional relationships and to the effectiveness of the educational system as a whole as stated below:

- the goal and focus problem: Teacher evaluation forms mostly rely on behavioral indicators to assess teaching, without reference to the appropriateness or effects of the teaching behaviors being measured (Findley and Estabrook, 1991).
- the problem of differential evaluation ideologies: Most current evaluation methods are characterized by a technical or scientific approach to inquiry, which gives precedence to the observer's judgment of teaching behavior, while little consultation with the teacher or reflection on the teacher's and students' interpretations of their classroom experiences is considered (Wood, 1992).
- the expertise problem: Evaluator competence is very important (Wood, 1992).
- the problem of hierarchy and control: Teacher evaluation forms tend to overlook teachers' own intentions and, thus, teachers are effectively silenced, becoming technicians concerned with implementing the ideas of others, rather than intellectuals involved in questioning and interrogating their own teaching (Wood, 1992; Findley and Estabrook, 1991).

Despite the possible negative effects, research indicates that many schools believe the benefits of this system and carry out performance evaluations. We, as a young school of 7 years, and with a recently installed administration in its second year, we believed that an appraisal system would bring benefits and therefore designed a comprehensive instructor, administrator, head, coordinator, trainer performance evaluation. The reasons for deciding to develop such a system was that the new administration had observed dissatisfaction, demotivation, and relatively high failure rates, specifically in the English Preparatory Program. This study is critically important as this is the first performance appraisal conducted within the school and it is assumed that the results of the study will lead to practical, beneficial, and effective implementations within the School of Foreign Languages. After a brief description of the institution, this study explains how the research was conducted, and finally presents conclusions and discusses some of the issues raised.

## **2. Methodology**

### *2.1. The institution (Teaching Context)*

The School of Foreign Languages prepares the students for their Faculties through an intensive English preparatory year. In addition to the English Preparatory Program, the School offers Undergraduate and Graduate English Programs and a compulsory second foreign languages (chosen from French, German, Italian, Greek,

Portuguese, Japanese, Russian, Spanish). 186 language teachers are employed on the basis of one year-contract. The instructors are responsible for teaching approximately 20 hours a week, invigilating, attending level meetings/seminars/workshops, and giving feedback on the courses/books. Instructors working within the Preparatory Program are organized into teams of level with one coordinator having responsibility for each team. In this way, the Program Head and four Preparatory level coordinators (Elementary, Pre-Intermediate, Intermediate and Upper-Intermediate) work with 110 instructors. The Program Head and coordinators of each of the eight Second Foreign Languages work with 50 instructors while the Head of Undergraduate English Program work with 20, and finally the Head of Graduate English Program work with 6. All the coordinators report to the Heads of Program and Heads of Programs to the Director and Assistant Directors. The Heads of the Program and coordinators are responsible for administrative and academic issues such as preparing syllabi, organizing level meetings, observing lessons, giving feedback and contributing to the appraisal system. There are also two Units and two Centers running within the School of Foreign Languages: The Teacher Development Unit (TDU), The Testing and Material Development Unit (TMDU), The Self-Access Center (SAC), and The Academic Writing Center (AWC).

The role of the TDU is to provide ongoing support to the teachers of foreign languages through the provision of a range of teacher development options. Four teacher-trainers work in the Unit, responsible for conducting observations, giving feedback, organizing seminars/workshops, in-house courses and contributing to the appraisal system. The role of the TMDU is to prepare quizzes and mid-terms for Preparatory Program and to design materials. Seven instructors work in the Unit. Four instructors work in the SAC, which provides a positive and supportive atmosphere for students to improve their autonomous skills outside the classroom, with materials carefully chosen to fulfill the objectives of the Preparatory Program. Two instructors work in the AWC, assisting graduate students and academic staff in all departments of the university with their academic writing.

The Administrators, the Heads, the Coordinators, the instructors, the TDU, the TMDU and the SAC were evaluated during the appraisal system in accordance with their job descriptions. AWC was not included in the evaluation process as this center offers service to the wider university rather than the instructors, coordinators, heads and the other Units in the School of Foreign Languages.

## *2.2. The Process*

First, the steps to be taken were identified and planned. Second, all the steps were made explicit to the instructors, the coordinators and the heads in order to orient them to the elements of a supportive evaluation system and prevent heightened anxiety and distance between instructors and the administration. Third, information was collected from a variety of sources for the sake of fairness to refrain from the views of one individual's classroom observations of an instructor, to ensure that evaluations not just one person's observations of an instructor, but a fair overall assessment. In order to collect data, observations by the trainers and the coordinators were conducted throughout the academic year and the questionnaires were developed in the first term based on the feedback given by the instructors. The final version of the questionnaires was filled out in May by the instructors, the coordinators, the heads, the administration and the students. The fourth step, interviews with the instructors, coordinators and the heads, were carried out at the end of the second term by the Director and Assistant Directors. To obtain an unbiased picture of an instructor's abilities, emphasis was put on teaching performance, rather than on the instructors as individuals and the feedback of others, such as students' views and reports by trainers and coordinators were taken into consideration as well (Murdoch, 2000; Findley and Estabrook, 1991).

## *2.3. Observations*

Each teacher was observed by a trainer and a coordinator separately throughout the academic year. Before the observations started, trainers and coordinators took part in a series of workshops to ensure all had similar perspectives on the focus and methodology of the observations, and specifications regarding observations such as the criteria and timing were agreed. Each observation had pre and post observation sessions and some teachers were observed two or three times as deemed necessary. Trainers and coordinators worked cooperatively and exchanged ideas on possible problems and specific teachers. At the end of the academic year, observation reports were prepared for each teacher and submitted to the administration.

## 2.4. Questionnaires

Having examined the studies and the research conducted in the field, and having considered the nature of the job descriptions regarding the staff and who should evaluate whom, we developed, piloted and revised the questionnaires, involving staff in the process of rephrasing or eliminating items which were not clear. The questionnaire was given in English to the staff as the school has a one-third native teacher population. A student questionnaire in Turkish was piloted on 20 preparatory students and revised accordingly. Students were invited to write comments about their teachers. All the questionnaires were designed on a five-point Likert scale –always, often, sometimes, rarely, never- and the rating levels were designed to describe how often the staff performed in each area of responsibility. The questionnaires were completed anonymously. The explanations regarding each questionnaire are as follows:

- *The Questionnaire completed by Coordinators and Trainers:* It covered 2 sub-dimension competencies: teaching and professionalism. Teaching dimension covered 20 items regarding personal qualities, knowledge, planning and preparation, and teaching. Professionalism covered 15 items regarding cooperation, oral and written communication, attendance and punctuality, participation, and carrying out duties. The teaching section was completed jointly by the TDU member responsible for observing that particular instructor's lesson, in consultation with the instructor's coordinator, whereas the professionalism section was filled out by coordinator alone, based on the observations and observation conferences conducted throughout year, and the other reports and comments on the instructor's compliance with duties and responsibilities.

- *The Questionnaire completed by Preparatory Program Instructors:* This covered five sections: the evaluation of the administration, the Head of Program, the Coordinator, the TDU, and the TMDU. Preparatory instructors evaluated the coordinators in terms of planning and organization, communication and collaboration, professional competence, leadership and evaluation. The items in the questionnaires covered the behaviors, responsibilities, and duties of administrators, heads, and trainers. Teachers filled out the questionnaires anonymously during the second week of May in a room large enough to ensure complete privacy. The questionnaires were distributed and collected by an assistant to minimize any inhibitions teachers may have felt.

- *The Questionnaire completed by Undergraduate and Second Foreign Languages Instructors:* This covered the evaluation of administration, the Heads of the Program, Coordinators and TDU. The TMDU was excluded, as these teachers do not work with this Unit.

- *The Questionnaires completed by Heads:* This covered four sections: the evaluation of Administration, Coordinators, TDU and TMDU, with provision made for adding comments. The Heads of Undergraduate English, Second Foreign Languages Program, and Graduate Program did not evaluate TMDU as they do not work with this Unit.

- *The Questionnaire completed by Coordinators:* This covered the evaluation of administration, the related head of program, TDU, and TMDU. The Second Foreign Languages Coordinators did not evaluate the TMDU as they do not work this Unit.

- *The Questionnaire completed by Administration :* This covered the evaluation of the Heads of Program and the Coordinators.

- *The Questionnaire completed by Students:* This covered two sub-sections; teaching and professionalism. The purpose was to obtain feedback directly from students on aspects of the instructor's performance which they could usefully comment on. 3600 students completed the questionnaire automatically and anonymously on the computer at the end of the second term. The students are the people who spend the most time interacting with a teacher and therefore are in a strong position to comment on teacher performance, thus, their views were especially taken into consideration (Theall and Franklin, 2001).

## 2.5. Analysis

Each questionnaire type was analyzed by using means, and bar graphs on each item were prepared for each instructor, Coordinator, Head of Program and Administration together with the written comments (if any) for each.

### 2.6 Performance interviews

#### 2.6.1 Before the interview:

20-minute appraisal interviews with each instructor were scheduled by making appointments appropriate to their weekly timetable in June. Before the interviews, the results from the students and the Coordinators and the trainers were examined by the Director and the Assistant Directors for any pattern of low ratings which could usefully be

brought to the attention of the instructor. Any significant differences between students' and coordinators' evaluations were carefully discussed and researched.

### 2.6.2 During the interviews

The Director and two Assistant Directors structured the interview, welcoming each instructor, informing him/her about the evaluations of students and coordinators/trainers, asking for self-reflection on the current academic year and sharing expectations regarding the next academic year. During the appraisal interviews, communication factors for effective interpersonal communication were used, including non-verbal attending, open and closed questions, paraphrasing, and reflection of feeling. At the end of the interview each teacher was asked to complete an action plan to reflect on weak and strong points, to set goals to reach before the next performance evaluation and to make written comments about. This plan was intended to cover key areas including classroom teaching, student support, and where appropriate, more personally-driven issues and areas of interest, and solutions. Action plans were returned in a week and signed by the teacher and the assistant director, responsible for TDU.

## 3. Conclusion

The results of the questionnaires suggest that Administration, Heads of Program and Coordinators **always** and **often** take their responsibilities in terms of planning, organization, communication, collaboration, professional competence, leadership and duties, whereas TDU and TMDU **sometimes** and **rarely** fulfill responsibilities. Most of the teachers **always** or **often** fulfill their responsibilities in terms of teaching and professionalism although few teachers had received low means (**sometimes** and **rarely**).

Interviews with the staff revealed the instructors' concerns. One of the most frequently expressed problem was that the preparatory program was very intensive and they had difficulty in keeping up with the program. Some also stated that the curriculum should be revised and updated both in terms of the objectives and the course books used. Some teachers voiced complaints about teaching at the same level for years and the need for a change. Interviews with the coordinators and the heads revealed their concerns as well. They voiced the problems like workloads of the instructors, disciplinary problems of students, and lack of visual aids.

The questionnaire results were sent electronically to each instructor individually for the sake of confidentiality which was highly appreciated. The results included the mean scores given to the Administration, his/her coordinator, his/her Head of Program, TDU, TMDU as well as the instructor's own mean score. The student evaluation results had already been sent separately by the university administration. Thus, the instructors really experienced the transparency, as had been presented as the school policy by the administration. Interviews with teachers led the administration to set up Curriculum and Material Development Unit to help the school to meet its objectives and to attain the goals stated in the Strategic Plan. Objectives were reviewed, revised, and updated, and the course books were changed in accordance with these new objectives. The instructors' strengths and weakness were reconsidered before assigning them to levels. All job descriptions were reviewed, revised and updated before personally delivered to each instructor. Action plans were carefully examined to help the administration become aware of the instructors' needs and expectations. However, some problems during the performance evaluation were encountered. These are:

Observations and observation conferences: Teachers expressed that they sometimes felt threatened by the observation experiences. They suggested that coordinators, and trainers should maximize teacher input at all stages of the observation process by asking the teacher to suggest a possible focus for the lesson. Post-observation sessions should be supportive and non-judgmental. Observations should always be notified in advance and should not only cover checklists, but should focus on the needs expressed by teachers.

Evaluation forms: Interestingly, Instructors' higher scores from coordinators did not necessarily mean higher scores from students, and vice versa, causing some difficulties when it came to the discussion and interpretation of the results with the instructors.

The Halo effect: One factor sometimes influenced ratings on all factors, for example student tended to give higher ratings to the instructors they liked regardless of their teaching. This seems to have been a frequent cause of discrepancies between scores of students, trainers and coordinators.

Personality Conflicts: This covered judgments and biases made purely on the basis of personality traits. Some teachers did not necessarily agree with everything a coordinator/trainer/administrator believed in or stated (Employee Performance Evaluation, East Tennessee State University, Guide 2006).

In conclusion, in terms of the administration, the appraisal system helped define roles and responsibilities more clearly, review and determine job descriptions, organizational goals and objectives, and led to continuous learning, team building and improved productivity. For instructors, it provided an opportunity to comment on their working environment, and made them feel valued because their opinions on the books/materials/program were sought. Any apprehension they may have initially felt at the beginning of the appraisal process seems to have been minimized, and it appears that they came to see the process as an opportunity of their work rather than a threat. Although teachers felt threatened at the outset of the appraisal process, they later accepted it as a treatment.

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