

Perceptions of Faculty on the Performance Appraisal Process

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Abstract In recent decades, there has been increasing pressure for teacher accountability. Additionally, interest in teacher evaluation throughout the field of education has grown. While research has been conducted on multiple factors contributing to student achievement, there is a lack of research in the Vietnamese culture on faculty perceptions of the meaning and interpretation of the faculty performance evaluation. This study addressed faculty perceptions of the evaluation process and overall impact on their teaching performance. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore full-time faculty members' perceptions of the performance appraisal (PA) process currently implemented at a local university (i.e., private university in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam). Data obtained from individual, semi-structured interviews with 12 full-time faculty was analyzed. After analysis of the data, salient findings were identified regarding the enhancement of teaching quality. Second, substantial factors contributing to the faculty's positive perceptions of the PA process and instructional methods were determined. Leading on from this, this study identified key factors that instructors believe are critical in an effective performance appraisal process. Furthermore, the leadership tools required to make the overall process meet instructors' expectations were met.

Keywords Faculty Perceptions, Faculty Performance Appraisal Process

1. Introduction

Student success is the overarching goal of education. Multiple studies have been conducted on key factors that lead to high student achievement, including the examination of the direct relationship between teaching and student learning [1-8]. Emerging from several studies is the significant role the evaluation process faculty plays in aiding student achievement [9-22]. According to these studies, educators who believe they are being fairly evaluated not only teach better, but also are more dynamic in helping students obtain success.

The Vietnamese educational system is no exception in regard to its interest in teacher accountability and evaluation. Education and training are considered the top priority among national policies [23]. Over the years there have been many debates internationally on how faculty should be evaluated. There have been few studies that have focused primarily on faculty preferences, evaluation design, and administration. In Vietnam, because there is a demand for high quality education, faculty evaluations have been a growing topic of concern in higher education in recent years. Currently the annual faculty evaluation is considered to be quite subjective, superficial, inconsistent, and considered only a formality [24-26]. Therefore, criteria on how to assess faculty are still needed in higher education in Vietnam [27].

2. The Performance Appraisal Process

The Performance Appraisal Process (PA) involves utilizing the appraisal information for development and evaluation consisting of only four stages: (a) establishing performance standards and explicitly communicating them to the employee, (b) observing one's performance, (c) comparing actual performance with the predetermined standards, and (d) taking action [28]. In order to facilitate effective processes, it is argued that the appraisal should be constructive. Appraisees should have opportunities to analyze their job responsibilities, quality of performance, and the problems encountered on the job prior to the evaluation of their performance. During the appraisal, faculty should be encouraged to voice their opinions, discuss and seek solutions to job concerns, and set mutually attainable goals [29]. High regard should be given to selecting the right individuals and training them to provide effective and constructive feedback. Universities utilize various methods of evaluating faculty. Higher education administrators increasingly view student outcomes as a priority in faculty advancement. Lohman [30] cites the student experience as a major criterion in evaluating faculty. Lohman further advocates for faculty cohorts so educators can glean from each other in the field and receive feedback from peers. This is but one way of incorporating the appraisal process and adds to the contemporary discussion on best practice of faculty appraisals.

According to Nguyen [27], Vietnamese universities still do not have any official criteria or standards that can be used to assess faculty. Therefore, in order to meet the demands of changing society, new teaching and learning contexts, and globalization, it is obvious that Vietnamese higher education institutions are in need of official criteria and standards to assess university instructors and their professional performance [26].

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore full-time faculty's perception of the evaluation process. At various universities in Vietnam, it is known as the performance appraisal process (PA). This study was implemented at a local Vietnamese university by (a) interpreting what meaning faculty gave to the performance appraisal process; (b) inquiring into how these perceptions affect instructors' teaching performance; and (c) discussing factors that are central to the applicability of the process as a means of improving overall instruction. The primary means of data collection were in-depth, and used open-ended interviews with 12 instructors.

The following questions were examined during this study:

1. What meaning do full-time faculty at a Vietnamese university give to the current performance appraisal process as determined through faculty interviews?

2. What factors do full-time faculty at a Vietnamese university identify as central to the applicability of the performance appraisal process in regard to improving instruction.

3. Methods

Participants were full-time instructors affiliated with the university in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. Participants varied in gender, ages, and disciplines. Participants selected for the research project had first-hand knowledge and at least three-years of experience with the evaluation process that was currently being implemented on campus. See Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic Background of Faculty Participants (N = 12)

Demographics	N	%
Gender		
Male	5	41.7
Female	7	58.3
Academic Title		
Master degree	8	66.7
Doctorate degree	4	33.3
Years working at the University		
3-5 years	5	41.7
6-10 years	7	58.3
Disciplines		
Economics and Commerce	3	25
Science and Technology	3	25
Polytechnic	3	25
Linguistic and Culture	3	25

4. Settings and Materials

This research study was conducted at the highest ranking and largest private university in Vietnam, which is located in the center of dynamic Ho Chi Minh City. The University, founded in 1991, now has more than 300 teaching staff and four departments. One-third of the faculty members have earned either a Ph.D. or an Ed.D. degree and the remainder have earned master's degrees. The University has a higher ranking because of its student-centered training methodology with an underlying philosophy of commitment to excellence [31].

Personal interviews were collected on faculty perspectives regarding the current PA process implemented on campus. The information collected from this case study was organized using Atlas.ti, a qualitative data analysis software program. Additionally, hand written notes were taken throughout the data collection process for clarification and reflection. Documentation of the coding process was examined to see if there were emerging themes throughout the data collection process. Interviews were conducted face-to-face and lasted about

45 to 60 minutes. If data or clarification for previous responses was needed, face-to-face interviews were conducted using a zigzag process-out [32]. All interviews were conducted in Vietnamese. Vietnamese was used to reduce anxiety and avoid any possible language-related difficulties [33]. Interviews were conducted in the participant's personal office or a conference room at a time chosen by him/her to minimize any interruptions. Open-ended questions were asked to elicit participants' perceptions of the current PA process [34]. Probing questions were also asked for clarification, illustration, and to keep interviewees focused on the topic discussed [35]. All interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed.

5. Results

All interviews were transcribed in Vietnamese and loaded into Atlas.ti for data analysis. Atlas.ti is a qualitative research tool that can be used to analyze codes or labels with chunks of text, sounds, pictures, or video. Data were analyzed, word by word, and then assigned initial and emerging codes to the segments of each interview during the data analysis [36]. After repeating the process with all of the interviews conducted, common themes were grouped into summaries and into smaller sets where themes and constructs were identified [37].

First, member checking was used by sharing interview transcripts, interpretations, and findings with the participants for confirmation of the accuracy of the data that was collected [32, 38-41]. Each participant was emailed a copy of the transcription for review and feedback. Second, probing questions were used to keep all collected data objective and free of any biases [35]. Thirdly, participants kept a self-reflective journal to record personal biases. Additionally, journals were used to help identify and control any possible influence on data collection as well as to interpretate findings of the study.

Fourth, the protocol strengthened research reliability of the study by avoiding any unexpected problems. Fifth, triangulation was used to support the trustworthiness of

the study. For this study, although interviews were the primary source of data collection, the selected participants varied in the experiences they had with the appraisal policies implemented on campus. Additionally, their disciplines and gender were also diverse. The length of time they had spent at the university was also different. Sixth, peer debriefing was used.

From the analysis of the data, two major themes for the first research questions emerged and were analyzed; (a) overall meaning faculty attributed to the PA process, and (b) the factors contributing to faculty perceptions of the PA process. Data revealed that the overall meaning of the PA process fell into two minor themes, positive and negative. Ten minor themes contributing to faculty perceptions emerged from the data. When faculty were asked about their perceived overall meaning of the PA process currently implemented on campus, participants eagerly opened and shared their perspectives. The participants shared positive and negative structures of the PA process. Eight of the participants perceived the PA process as helpful and a relevant tool. However, four participants expressed their discontent with the PA process.

The majority of participants attributed a positive meaning to the PA process. Participants stated that they were overall satisfied with their recent evaluative ratings. Participants perceived the PA process as a helpful and relevant tool to accurately evaluate faculty performance that would help further enhance their teaching performance. Participants found the PA process helpful, stating the rubrics were clear. Additionally, the results of their ratings provided them with valuable input on how to improve their instructional performance. Participants who attributed negative connotations to the PA process stated it was unfair to use the same criteria to evaluate the specific assignments of faculty who were in different departments. Participants also highlighted the time-consuming feature of the PA process. They believed the PA process added stress overload to their work. It was noted that the four participants who made negative comments each came from the four departments. See Table 2.

Table 2. Positive and Negative Comments of the Performance Appraisal Process

Positive Comments	Negative Comments
"I think the current PA is helpful and relevant. I agree with the results of the PA process."	"The same rating rubrics are often used in different departments and do not accurately reflect the unique specifics of the assignments in each department. Therefore, the instrument does not accurately measure all the data."
"My ratings correctly reflect how well I do my job in an academic year and bring me reasonable rewards."	"I think the PA process is time-consuming and useless. I do not see its benefits. I still do my job well without being evaluated. I would prefer not to participate in the PA process if it is not required."
"I strongly agree with the rating results because the rating rubrics are clear."	"In my opinion, the evaluation results are very subjective because they are mainly based on the evaluator's decision."
"I am happy with the University PA process because the expectations are clear and relevant. Evaluation results helped me improve my instructional performance."	"I have to admit that the university performance appraisal added stress to my workload."
"I think the University evaluation instrument is up-to-date, and it has proved the university's best effort in adapting new faculty evaluation approaches in the world."	"The evaluation checklists are vague. They cannot measure all the details that I did in an academic year."

Participants were asked about factors that contributed to their perceptions and meaning of the PA process. Faculty perceptions of factors contributing to the PA process were categorized into ten minor themes: (a) faculty perceptions of the PA purposes, (b) faculty perceptions of the PA criteria, faculty perceptions of the PA implementation, (d) faculty perceptions of the PA procedures, (e) faculty perceptions of the PA self-reflection component, (f) faculty attitude toward the PA process, (g) perceptions of faculty involvement in the PA design and development, (h) faculty perceptions of the role of the evaluator in the PA process, (i) faculty perceptions of the benefit of feedback and communication in the PA process, and (j) faculty perceptions of the fairness of the PA process. See Table 3.

The second research question asked was, "What influences do full-time faculty at a university in Vietnam identify as central to the applicability of the performance appraisal process in regards to improving instruction?" In

the second research question, influences of the university performance appraisal on faculty members' instructional improvement were perceived by the participants. Narrative data the participants shared during semi-structure interviews were categorized into two major themes: (a) the positive influences of the PA process on improving instruction, and (b) the negative influences of the PA process on improving instruction. The positive influences of the PA process on improving instruction perceived by participants included the following four minor themes: (a) positive influences of professional development on instructional improvement, (b) positive influences of self-reflection on instructional improvement, (c) positive influences of instructional improvement feedback, and (d) positive influences of student ratings on instructional improvement. Participants believed the professional development component of the PA process favorably impacted instruction. See Table 4.

Table 3. Faculty Perceptions of the Performance Appraisal Process

Faculty perceptions of the performance appraisal purposes	"The evaluation results help me self-reflect on my strengths and weaknesses in my performance so that I can modify my instructional practices to benefit student learning." "Evaluation ratings inspire instructors to grow professionally."
Faculty perceptions of the performance appraisal criteria	"I have been already overloaded with all the teaching assignments. I do not think I have time and energy for community services."
Faculty perceptions of the performance appraisal implementation	"All instructors are evaluated once at the end of the academic year by their department head. There is a clear timeline for the evaluation implementation. The department head, I think, is well aware of the guidelines and follow them."
Faculty perceptions of the performance appraisal procedures	"I always look back at the rating results to identify my strengths and weaknesses and modify my practices." "I do not see any benefit of the evaluation. It has no influence on my teaching practices. I still do my job well no matter [whether] I am evaluated or not."
Faculty attitude toward the performance appraisal process	"I strongly believe the PA process has modified my teaching practices because the ratings results have indicated my strengths and weaknesses in teaching." "I still do my job well without being evaluated. The evaluation process is tiring and stressful."
Perceptions of faculty involvement in the performance appraisal design and development.	"I am already overloaded with my teaching assignments, mentoring students, supervising students' projects, as well as doing the administrative tasks. I do not think I am interested in participating in the PA design and development. Moreover, I do know that my participation is just a formality and my ideas are put in practice."
Faculty perceptions of the role of the evaluator in the performance appraisal process.	"I think my department head is a good evaluator. He always takes the PA process seriously and provides me with the support and guidance I need." "I do not agree with the ratings I have had. I think they are so subjective. The supervisor made all decisions about the ratings without giving me a chance to speak up even when I believed they were unfair or incorrect."
Faculty perceptions of the benefit of feedback and communication in the performance appraisal process.	"My supervisor did not spend adequate time talking with me about my ratings. He spoke very little and just gave me back my evaluation paperwork without any explanation. He just wanted to get this obligatory process done as quickly as possible."
Faculty perceptions of the fairness of the performance appraisal.	"I strongly agree with the criteria of the evaluation rubrics. I think they are clear and specific. I know what the university expects from me and appreciate the university's recognition of my hard work." "The supervisor made all decisions about the ratings without giving me a chance to speak up even when I believed they were unfair or incorrect."

Table 4. Positive and Negative Influences of Performance Appraisal Process

Positive influences of professional development on instructional improvement.	"I myself would not see the necessity of getting higher qualification if I was not reminded again and again each year in the PA process. This reminder had influenced me to get my Ph.D. Now I can obviously see the benefits of attending the program for my students and myself as an educator." "The evaluation process motivated me to advance in my profession and boosted my self-esteem as well as my skills so that I could teach my students better."
Positive influences of self-reflection on instructional improvement	"I feel really good about all the ratings I have received so far. Self-reflecting on all the good feedback I have received in the previous and current PA make me more motivated in improving my performance." "The rating results helped me to self-reflect and recognize my strengths and weaknesses in my teaching. Thanks to them, I knew what I did well and what I failed in facilitating my students' learning."
Positive influences of instructional improvement feedback	"My department head is an experienced professional. His feedback was a precious guidance and encouragement in the improvement of my instructional performance."
Positive influences of student ratings on instructional improvement	"I always value the ratings my students give me because they are reliable data for me to plan changes and make modification in my instruction." "Most of the students take the evaluation process seriously; therefore, I always try my best to adapt my lectures to their requirements by correcting my weakness and boosting my strengths."
Negative influences of the performance appraisal process on improving instruction.	"I still did my job well without being evaluated. I always improved my lectures because of the increasing demand of my students, not due to being evaluated." "The PA process has added more stress to my work that is already overloaded. Community service is an example. Therefore, I do not have time to invest in developing my lessons."

6. Discussion

Qualitative data analysis revealed findings that offered an insight into their perceptions of the PA process at the university. Overall results indicated that there were positive faculty perceptions of the PA process. Professional development, self-reflection, feedback, and student ratings were considered significant influences in improving teaching practices. Participants perceived the PA process positively. While the data showed that a majority of the faculty participants appreciated the PA process, the data also indicated that the purpose of the PA was clear and understood by the participants and would enhance their teaching. Findings indicate that the involvement in the evaluation process motivated faculty to perform at higher levels. Also noted by the participants, was their desire for multiple sources of evaluation information to be incorporated into the PA process. During the interviews, all participants commented that they would like the university to apply additional types of evaluation such as committee evaluation, final grade(s) distribution in courses, student examination performance, and/or long-term follow up of graduates to the PA process. Fourth, participants perceived the evaluator as the most important contributing factor to the effectiveness of the current PA process. In interviews, the majority of the faculty participants expressed positive remarks about their supervisor or evaluator. The participants also believed that the feedback they received during the annual evaluation meetings was encouraging and was useful in improving their instruction. The interview data also revealed the trust that faculty members placed in their supervisors. These findings indicate the need for evaluators to be diligent in giving faculty every opportunity to receive constructive

and high-quality feedback; thereby promoting professional growth and self-improvement through the PA process. Fifth, participants believed that students' feedback should be an official criterion of the evaluation in the PA process. The participants also stated student ratings helped them to refine instructional objectives, modify teaching content and methods, modify exams, alter or update course textbooks, and to choose supplementary materials. Lastly, these overall findings considered participants' perceptions of professional development as having an influential impact on improving their instructional performance. During the interviews, the faculty mentioned that professional development, self-reflection, student ratings and feedback from the evaluator were positive influences of the PA process on their improving their instruction.

7. Limitations

A limitation of the study was that the language of the participants was primarily Vietnamese, while the researcher was bilingual. Collecting and transcribing data from the study was time intensive and required a thorough explanation of words in both languages. The study was conducted by the researcher who worked at the university where the study was conducted. Another limitation was the ability to gather viable studies for the literature review from educational entities due to transparency limitations. The results of this study contribute to the ongoing improvement of university appraisal processes and inform international practices. The findings may also generate additional research to impact appraisal policy reforms.

8. Conclusions

As a result of these findings, this study could serve as a catalyst for policymakers and school leaders to improve the existing evaluation processes and seek an insight into how instructors perceive these policies and what factors contribute to their overall perceptions. The findings of this study could also stimulate further research on appraisal policy reform. Identifying key factors that instructors believe are critical for an effective evaluations process could assist leadership within an institution to find the tools that would make the current policies meet instructors' expectations. Exploring the faculty voice provides authentic meaning of the evaluation process as experienced by the participants. Further findings emphasize the impact of faculty evaluations on successful appraisals. Moreover, this study made a significant contribution to the gap in the existing Vietnamese literature on faculty evaluation.

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