

Teacher Evaluation in Oman: Policy, Implementation, and Challenges

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Teacher evaluation is a significant means for ensuring accountability and promoting teacher professional development. However, the road to good implementation of teacher evaluation system rarely goes without challenges and constraints. The fourteen interviewees who participated in this study faced several constraints in implementing teacher evaluation in the Sultanate of Oman. Some of these obstacles were: Lack of incentives; inadequate evaluators' training; heavy burden of administrative duties with less empowerment; lack of teachers and evaluators' commitment towards teacher evaluation system. These organizational and technical factors inhibit the performance of teachers and evaluators alike. The study recommends that teachers and evaluators must be given the needed assistance so that the evaluation process is implemented effectively for the teacher development and performance improvement.

Keywords: teacher evaluation, professional development, evaluation, Oman.

تقويم المعلم في سلطنة عمان: السياسات والتنفيذ والتحديات

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يعد تقويم أداء المعلم احد الوسائل المهمة لضمان المساءلة والمحاسبة كما انه يهدف الى رفع المستوى المهني للمعلم. إلا أن التطبيق الفاعل والناجح لعملية التقويم نادرا ما يتم دون عقبات وصعوبات تعترضه. شارك في هذه الدراسة اربعة عشر مشاركا تحدثوا عن تجربتهم الفعلية في تنفيذ عملية التقويم في سلطنة عمان. بعض الصعوبات التي ذكرها المشاركون تتمثل في: نقص التعزيز؛ عدم كفاية تدريب المقومين؛ ضغط وثقل الاعمال الادارية الملقاة على عاتق القائمين بالتقويم في مقابل الصلاحيات الضعيفة الممنوحة لهم؛ بالإضافة الى ضعف التزام كل من المعلم والمقوم تجاه نظام التقويم. هذه العوامل التنظيمية والتقنية لها دور في تراجع اداء كل من المعلم والمقوم على حد سواء. اوصت الدراسة بتوفير المساعدة اللازمة لكل من المعلم والمقوم حتى يتم تنفيذ عملية التقويم بشكل فاعل يساهم في نمو المعلم وتطوير ادائه.

الكلمات المفتاحية: تقييم المعلمين، التطوير المهني، التقويم، سلطنة عمان.

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Teaching quality has been long considered a significant factor that has a potential to affect the student learning. Darling-Hammond (1990, p. 18) pointed out that "the public has come to believe that the key to educational improvement lies in upgrading the quality of teachers as in revamping school program and curricula". Teacher evaluation is widely acknowledged as an important mean that can improve teaching quality. That is, according to Andrews (2004, p. 73) "defining and knowing quality teaching is the first step in the appraisal process of teachers."

Assessing the actual teaching and learning process is not an easy task. It needs understanding of the contexts that shape teaching and learning process. These contexts are a result of several variables interwoven together. These variables according to Darling-Hammond and Snyder (2000, p. 524) are such as "school organization, resources, materials, amount of time and how it is structured for learning, the duration and nature of relationships among students and teachers, community norms and values that influence the processes and outcomes of teaching decisions". All of these variables should be considered in studying the effectiveness of teacher evaluation

Most scholars asserted that the essential purposes of teacher evaluation are improving teacher performance and ensuring accountability (Stronge, 2006, Danielson & McGreal, 2000; Duke, 1995, and Darling-Hammond, 1990). Many authors noted that the perception of professional development is associated with the formative evaluation, while accountability is allied with the summative evaluation. During the evaluation sessions information is gathered by systematic observations and other tools, not merely to gauge the teacher performance, but also to strengthen this performance via identifying insufficiencies, providing feedback, and guiding teacher to develop his/her professional development track than pursue it.

As a result, the integration of the two types of teacher evaluation, the formative and the summative is the best way to avoid any contradictories that might appear while pursuing the ultimate goals of teacher evaluation by ensuring accountability and promoting the professional development of the teacher. Danielson & McGreal (2000, p: 28) support a posi-

tion in which "two masters are served" by combining formative and summative elements in the process. They suggest that "the principal features of such an integrated system include a differentiated approach to a culture of professional inquiry, and carefully designed evaluation activities".

Teacher evaluation in Oman is considered as an important tool to identify the professional needs as well as enhance the teacher performance. Thus, it is compulsory for schools and districts around the Sultanate to evaluate teachers regularly. Article (20) of the Civil Service law promulgated by Royal Decree Number (120/2004) states, "Annual performance assessment reports of the employees shall be prepared according to the efficiency measurement system set by the Civil Service Ministry in the way that suits the nature of work in the units. All employees shall be subject to the said system, except the employees of special grades, experts, and advisers."

Objectives of the study

A growing body of research shows that the quality of the teacher in the classroom is the single most important schooling factor predicting student outcomes (e.g., Stronge, 2006; Goldhaber & Anthony, 2007; Darling-Hammond et al., 1999, Natriello, 1990). Teacher evaluation is considered to be a significant constituent in teaching quality and teaching/learning enhancement. Accordingly, this study aims at investigating whether teacher evaluation in the selected schools in the Sultanate of Oman is implemented as such to achieve the desired main goals i.e. accountability and teacher professional development. Therefore, the guiding questions framing this study are as follows:

- (1) What are teachers and evaluators' perspectives regarding the implementation of teacher evaluation policy in Oman?
- (2) What are the organizational and technical factors influencing teachers and evaluators perspectives about the implementation of teacher evaluation in Oman?

Theoretical framework

Strong & Tucker (2003) assert that "High-quality performance evaluation can become a mechanism to promote lifelong learning and instructional effectiveness for teachers" (p. 10). For the policy makers in the educational or-

ganizations to benefit from the advantages of teacher evaluation, it is supreme to them to understand what factors that affect the evaluation process and what are the perceptions of the implementers towards these factors. Andrews (2004 p. xviii) argues that "teaching can be improved through teacher evaluation if it is taken seriously, accomplished by competent administrators and supported by serious governing boards' intent on improving instruction in their schools and colleges". Only by this way, teacher evaluation can fulfil its ultimate objectives.

For the purposes of this study, the researcher developed the framework of Peterson and Peterson (2006) on the effective teacher evaluation system (Figure 1). This framework emphasizes the factors that influence the effectiveness of teacher evaluation system. Also, for the purpose of this study, some factors mentioned by Peterson and Peterson (2006) were collapsed under one major category. For example, the elements variable data sources, multiple data sources, and differentiated evaluation of teachers can be shrunken in the factor "Differentiated evaluation".

Figure 1: Effective Teacher Evaluation (adapted from Peterson and Peterson, 2006)

The following paragraphs comprise in brief the factors that influence the effectiveness of teacher evaluation:

1) Systems of the evaluation Standards

Teacher evaluation system has to establish a well developed set of standards and crite-

ria for expected teacher duties and performance. Stronge & Tucker (2003) classify the teachers' areas of responsibility into four main categories. They include:

- Knowledge and skills: it would be hard to visualize a teacher lacking the requisite skills to convey a certain body of knowledge in such a manner that students can recognize, understand, and appreciate the material.
- Assessment: the teacher is expected to evaluate and support the learning needs of students to encourage optimal student attainment.
- Communication and community relations: "the role of teacher today extends beyond the classroom, across the school and into the community" (p. 14).
- Ongoing development: because of the rapidly changing world, "teachers must reflect on their practice and strive to enhance the skills and knowledge necessary to be effective with students" (p. 14). Teachers, like other professionals, must insist for lifelong development, ongoing professional development as a vehicle to improve and learn as an adult in order to enhance their classrooms and schools with their acquired expertise.

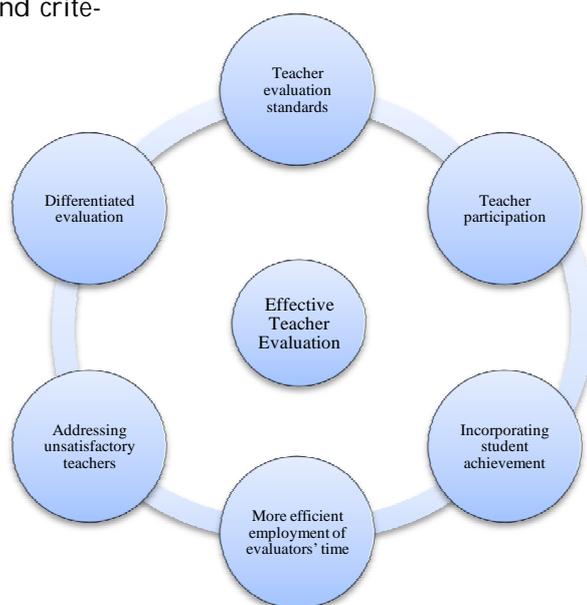


Fig. 1: Effective Teacher Evaluation (Adapted Peterson And Peterson, 2006)

2) Increased teacher participation

Since teacher evaluation system aimed to promote teacher professional development, a teacher involvement should be in the first priority while designing the evaluation policy. Evaluation system can engage teacher effectively in the evaluation process via self-evaluation or by evaluating his or her colleagues. Moreover, teacher can involve him/her-self in modifying the evaluation standards, suggesting proper tools or recommending suitable procedures of the evaluation. Teacher contribution and advocacy are vital to the development of teacher evaluation programs and the initiatives of teacher achievement.

3) Options for including student achievement

Despite the large debate among educators regarding the Student achievement as a factor in deciding teacher advancement, most educators acknowledge the importance of considering student achievement in assessing all aspects of teacher performance (Stronge & Tucker, 2003, Peterson, 2000). According to Peterson and Peterson (2006, p. 6) "Actual end-of-year performance may be analyzed by comparison with the individual student's (a) pattern of gain in the subject area for the past three or more years (b) group membership on characteristics associated with learning (c) performance on statistically analyzed item pools compared with prior years or (d) carefully designed and validated".

4) Efficient use of evaluator time

Evaluators in most cases have heavy burden of administrative duties and responsibilities that impede them from devoting their time to supervise and evaluate teachers. One obstacle encountering evaluators is how to cope with higher demands for time exhausted in several school activities, monitoring students, and dealing with myriad administrative duties. "Supervision developments such as walk-through, systematic independent teacher data collection, and increased teacher involvement create new resources for principal supervision of teacher evaluation (Peterson and Peterson, 2006, p. 9)".

5) Differentiated teacher evaluation

Better evaluation system differentiates between teachers experiences, subjects, and ca-

reer position. Treating all teachers by the same frequency, nature, and extent of evaluation is unfair for teachers. Danielson and McGreal (2000) pointed out that many existing teacher evaluation models are using a 'one-size-fits-all' approach for both novice and veteran teachers. They suggested that the principal features of a system that includes a differentiated approach that recognizes the life cycles of teaching allow more serious data gathering for teachers as well as provide a good opportunity for teacher professional development. Employing variable data sources allows data collected to be "tailored to specific performances, match the circumstances of each teacher, and use individual data sources for some teachers when unavailable or inappropriate for others" (Peterson and Peterson, 2006, p. 4).

In addition, there are many sources of data that are helpful in investigating teacher performance. Multiple data sources have a potential to enhance teacher evaluation system because teaching is complex to an extent that no single source adequately evaluates all aspects of teaching performance. Multiple data sources also can provide more validity to the evaluation system. Multiple data sources include: students' opinion, parents view, peer review, and student achievement data.

6) Systems for dealing with the unsatisfactory teacher

Although it is a tough task to recognize and identify the unsatisfactory teacher, "it is a myth that it is virtually impossible to dismiss the unsatisfactory teacher" (Peterson and Peterson, 2006, p. 11). Cooperation between evaluators and policy makers can produce systematic strategies for identifying and dealing with poor performance teacher. Addressing the insufficient teacher can provide a good chance for both school and society to weed out the teacher bad performance.

METHOD

This investigative study was conducted using the qualitative approach. Qualitative approach has the ability to provide deep description of the peoples' experiences of the topic under study. Given that, other forms of research methods often do not help to investigate deeply into the complexity of a problem. Denzin and Lincoln (2005, p. 10), asserted that qualitative research is multi-method in focus,

“involving a naturalistic and interpretative approach to its subject matter and an ongoing critique of the politics and methods of post positivism”.

For the purposes of this study, purposive sampling strategies of interviewing were considered critical for achieving the research intention, since this approach has the potential to provide trustworthiness to a research. Seven Post- Basic schools in the Sultanate of Oman were selected as the research site with nine teachers, two supervisors, and three school principals of the selected schools as the respondents. Semi-structural interviews with the teachers, school principals, and supervisors were the primary means of collecting data. Each informant was interviewed once; in some cases follow-up interviews were conducted for illustration, confirmation, or requesting more elaboration purposes. The researcher posed unstructured questions during interviews' sessions in order to gain more in-depth information. All interviews were conducted in Arabic language since it is the formal language in the Sultanate. All interviews were recorded and transcribed as well. The Arabic transcription then got translated to English.

Moreover, analysis of policy and school documents related to teacher evaluation were utilized in data collection as well. This study extensively collects as well as analyzes multiple documents pertaining to the implementation process. The Ministry and schools provided some formal and informal policy documents. Formal documents comprise of official Ministry documents, such as decrees, reports, teachers' guide, administrators' guide and the Ministry's portal. Informal documents comprise of the documents collected by the researcher but not issued by the Ministry such as e-mails and handwritten responses aimed to analyze the questions.

Data obtained by interviews were verified through the documents collected during the study. Every single case was treated individually and then all seven cases were compared and cross-analyzed. Cross-case analysis of the interview data of all the fourteen participants is a key element of the research design. The main purposes of cross-case analysis according to Yin (2003, p. 146) are: “(1) to summarize the extent and types of transformation in the individual cases; and (2) to analyze the

driving forces that produced transformation among the [cases]”.

The data was analyzed via NVivo9, a Qualitative Data Analysis (QDA) computer software package produced by QSR International. NVivo has good advantages and may significantly improve the quality of research. This computer program was very helpful in managing, coding, and analyzing the qualitative data. The coding scheme was developed based on the research question. The coded data were then classified to several categories according to the emerging themes, as suggested by Denzin & Lincoln (2005).

It is worth mentioning that the small number of the informants limited the study from generalization. However, data collected and finding obtained are adequate to indicate the situation of the implementation of teacher evaluation in the Sultanate of Oman. Moreover, it is adequate to consider the sort of obstacles that impede the evaluation system in reaching its admirable goals. Employing both documents and interviews, offered to some extent validity and trustworthiness of the data being collected and the process being followed. Validity and trustworthiness are both considered important factors in any qualitative research.

RESULTS

The finding indicated a number of remarkable phenomena related to the implementation of teacher evaluation in the Sultanate of Oman. The initial stage of interviews revealed that the fourteen informants in the study participated in one way or another in the implementation of teacher evaluation system. They deemed that teacher evaluation is an important element in the educational system. They as well believe that teacher evaluation system if implemented well, could promote the quality of teaching/ learning process.

This finding is compatible with the new paradigm of the role of teacher evaluation as a significant means of enhancing teacher performance and ensuring accountability (Danielson, 1996, 2007; Peterson & Peterson, 2006, Sergiovanni & Starratt, 2002). It also aligns with the study of Alghanbousi (2010) who found that the instructional leaders in the Sultanate of Oman value the process of teacher evaluation and consider it as a helpful means for assessing teachers and assisting them in fulfilling their duties.

However, the participants have some reservations on how the evaluation is conducted in their schools. These reservations pertain to the organizational, social, and technical aspects. The consequence sections deal more with these findings.

Teachers’ and evaluators’ perspectives on the implementation of teacher evaluation

The first research question aims to probe the teachers’ and evaluators’ perspectives of the implementation of teacher evaluation in the Sultanate. The responses given are organized under the six elements of the framework developed from the framework of Peterson and Peterson (2006).

Table 1
The Responses of the Participants Regarding These Elements

The factor	Sufficient	Insufficient	To some extent
Teacher evaluation standards	7 (50%)	3 (21.5%)	4 (28.5%)
Teacher participation	3(21.5%)	5 (35.5%)	6 (43%)
Incorporating student achievement	3 (21.5%)	8 (57%)	3 (21.5%)
Efficient employment of evaluators’ time	3 (21.5%)	10 (71%)	1(7.5%)
Differentiated evaluation	2 (14%)	9 (64.5%)	3 (21.5%)
Addressing unsatisfactory teachers	1(7.5%)	8 (57%)	5 (35.5%)

Standards and criteria

According to the Ministry of Education (2009, p. 19) in Oman “the evaluation system adopted a standards approach”, which means that, the evaluation is based on certain standards and criteria in identifying the performance of each teacher. Several standards for summative and formative evaluation are prepared for this purpose. Most of the interviewees see these standards clear and they reflect the actual teacher practice.

Despite that, some interviewees mentioned that some standards are broad, vague, and general. One teacher illustrated this point saying: *There are generalities in some standards such as the standard for “professional development” or “teaching techniques”. How would the principal determine whether this teacher has developed professionally or not and whether his methods of teaching are creative and innovative or*

just conventional, routine methods?(Teacher from school 4).

Moreover, some interviewees raise the point of lack of clear description of these standards. One supervisor was wondering about the standard “The teacher has developed professionally”:

What are the indications of that? Writing an article in a magazine or journal on education? Or giving a lecture in schools for his colleagues? Or improving his teaching standard? How many articles or lectures or books should he read? Otherwise the process of assessment would be just guesswork, not a precise definition of the level of teacher performance (the 2nd supervisor).

Similarly, the standard of “personal appearance” causes confusion among teachers and evaluators as well. As one male teacher said *“we know that all female teachers want to be looking good. How could that be measured?* (teacher from school 5). All in all, some interviewees have doubts about the clarity and preciseness of these standards which they think should be clear and precise in describing what is expected from the teacher to do.

Teacher participation

Regarding the participation in teacher evaluation, some interviewees acknowledge that teachers should be engaged in self-evaluation, peer review, and some cooperative activities related to teacher evaluation. They believe that this involvement would increase their motivation towards the phenomenon of teacher evaluation. Most interviewees are not happy about the evaluation practices. One teacher expresses that *“teachers are soliciting the upper authority to accept his or her experiences regarding teaching, supervision, or evaluation”* (Teacher from school 6). But the fact is that: *“Nobody listens to our suggestions or recommendations”* (Teacher from school 6).

Other teacher stated that: *“in reality there is no voice for a teacher in most of the critical decisions related to his career such as evaluation or supervision (Teacher from school 4)”. “We admit that teacher involvement enhances quality of teaching; values supervision practices and recognises teacher evaluation, but we still do not see much involvement of teachers in the whole evaluation process”* (3rd school principal). Indeed policy makers are strongly encouraged to involve teachers

effectively in different ways in the evaluation process.

Incorporating student achievement

Improving the entire student's personality is considered an ultimate goal desired by the Ministry. All the initiatives and plans aim to promote student success in his future life. The Ministry of Education (2006, p. 68) asserted that "Students' achievement could be measured before and after the mentoring programme to ascertain whether or not there is improvement". That is because "without effective assessment and evaluation it is impossible to know what students have learned, whether teaching has been effective or how best to address students' learning needs" (p. 78).

Probing this issue with the interviewees disclose that the evaluators do not stress the necessity of closely linking students' assessment with teacher evaluation, although, the students' achievement allows the principal and the supervisor to identify whether it meets the teacher performance. Many teachers deny being asked by their evaluators about their students' achievement. Evaluators as well consider that "*teacher performance cannot be assessed by the student learning since the latter is affected by many factors such as school atmosphere, parents follow-up, social, cultural, and economic conditions of the family*" (the 1st supervisor).

Efficient employment of evaluator's time

Evaluators I have met consistently point out that the most challenge to the implementation of teacher evaluation that aims to promote teacher professional development as well as ensures accountability, is lack of time. This seems to be the case in a variety of schools. Evaluators and teachers alike complain of the large administrative burden on their shoulders which diminishes their ability to follow up teachers regularly. That undoubtedly, impedes evaluators from ensuring quality teaching and hinders them from supervising their teachers and evaluating their progress.

One school principal complaining that: "*in existence of myriad administrative functions; we don't focus on teacher evaluation, I believe that entails more consideration of time, effort, and money spent for implementing teacher evaluation policy. In the time being, there are recognizable shortages in most of these resources* (2nd school principal)". Nearly same responses obtained from other school principal, who said: "*Sometimes*

time is not enough, due to the heavy workload of management duties assigned to me, such as attending to administrative, financial, social and public relations affairs, in addition to shifts and other managerial affairs (1st school Principal).

While conducting this study, the researcher got confirmation from many interviewees that, each supervisor has a number of teachers to supervise and evaluate ranging from thirty to seventy teachers. Needless to say, time allocated for each supervisor is limited. It is not easy to evaluate the teacher performance and encourage professional development of the teacher in this case. As a result, the evaluation is conducted in an inappropriate manner.

Differentiated evaluation

The Civil Service Law promulgated by Royal Decree Number (120/2004) has assigned the direct supervisor with the responsibility of reporting on his/her subordinates. Article (23) stipulates: "The direct manager shall prepare the reports of performance assessment of the employees under his supervision and then refer them to the senior manager for approval". In the Omani educational system, three parties are responsible for the teacher evaluation; the supervisor, the school principal, and the senior teacher. That is to provide the evaluation with enough amounts of validity and trustworthiness. This issue was also confirmed by all interviewees I have met.

Moreover, the Ministry recognizes this matter, that is why it is considering making changes in the teacher evaluation process by upgrading some evaluation tools. The Ministry of Education urges evaluators and teachers to use several supervisory and evaluative data sources for supervising and gathering information about the teacher. Beside classroom observation, they can utilize sources such as: "Mutual visiting; Reflective practice; Self-evaluation; Individual meeting; and Action research" (Ministry of Education, 2009, p. 33).

Despite that, many interviewees asserted that classroom observation is the only technique utilized in their schools. In one teacher's words: "*Our evaluation system rely merely on the classroom observation. I am wondering why we do not consider some tools such as portfolio, action research and student achievement. These are very powerful tools* (teacher from school 1).

Some evaluators try to employ various tools in evaluation but they do not receive positive

responses from teachers and from administrators alike. One supervisor pointed out that: *"I have been, regularly, attempting to convince my teachers that, by conducting our own action research we could expand and enhanced our own performance and the students' achievement"* (2nd supervisor).

The supervisor though complains that: there is no positive response from most of the teachers. He attributed that to two reasons: Lack of commitment from teachers as well as from administrators about action research strategy, and the blur in understanding the action research approach. The supervisor explains his point of view saying *"for the first reason there is no authentic encouragement from the upper management toward action research, all that we see is individual initiatives by some school principals and senior teachers"* (2nd supervisor).

Regarding the second cause, the supervisor recognises that, most of the teachers, senior teachers, school principals, and even supervisors have suspense about the reality of action research, the way it is conducted, and the contribution of action research in teaching/learning environment. That refers according to him to the *"deficiency of academic information provided to stakeholders regarding these issues"* (2nd supervisor).

Likewise, it seems that using portfolio is a principal personal initiative not a common phenomenon used in supervision and evaluation process. Numerous interviewees I have met don't know about portfolio or at least have misconception about the role of this tool as well as about its content. An interviewee ratified that, *"honestly, I know that there is a file that comprises of my qualification certificates and my sick leaves and some administrative information only. Also, we have the student's file, which comprises of the student's achievement and his rating"* (teacher from school 3). A 3rd school principal stated that *"we used portfolios three years ago, but since nobody was interested in it, teachers felt that it is a burden of extra duties, so they disregarded it, and no one now pays attention to it"* (3rd school principal).

Interviewees confirmed to me that, peer coaching and peer review are currently, implemented in their schools. Many of them have included peer coaching plans in their executive plan as a way to improve the quality of teaching. They acknowledge that supervisors,

school principals, and senior teachers need to exert extra efforts regarding this issue.

Addressing unsatisfactory teachers

In the Sultanate of Oman the decision regarding teacher's career based on the evaluation report and in alignment with the current civil service law, was issued by a Royal Decree number 120/2004. Indeed, this law identifies the type of incentives and sanctions that should be followed regarding the teacher performance. Article (21) from the civil service law states that: *"An employee shall be notified in writing by his direct supervisor if he has been accused of carelessness, default or any other kind of weakness. This is in order to take necessary measures to eliminate the causes"*. Also article (26) from the same civil service law declares that: *"The employee who has been ranked poor continuously for two years shall be presented to the Staff Affairs Committee. If the Committee finds him suitable for another job at the same level, the Committee shall recommend his transfer. If the Committee finds him unsuitable, it shall propose his termination"*.

Vis-à-vis the implementation of these regulations, many interviewees lamented repeatedly over the difficulty of taking decision regarding the unsatisfactory teacher. One teacher articulated that: *"It's really, really tough situation. In our school, it's so hard to be a good school principal. It is too difficult to protect the unsatisfactory teacher from the accountability, as well as it is hard to deal with him because you have no authority"* (2nd school principal). Based on his experience, one teacher observed that, *"an evaluator rarely rates his teacher unsatisfactory even if it is the reality; rather, he rates him excellent in any case not to embarrass his teacher"* (teacher from school 2).

Needless to say, the feedback provided by the evaluator by reports allows the teacher to be self confident in teaching and consequently encourages the teacher to be creative and provide new ideas and materials in teaching. Thus, in the opinion of most interviewees, teachers need to be informed about evaluation results and should not be kept secret.

Research question 2: contextual factors

The second research question stated that: What are the organizational and technical factors influencing teachers and evaluators perspectives about the implementation of teacher evaluation in the Sultanate of Oman? This

question mainly explores the external factors (resources for professional development, organizational structure, and social relationship) that ease or limit the implementation of teacher evaluation in the Omani schools.

The interview data revealed that several factors have shaped the implementation of teacher evaluation system and enhanced some negative practices of the evaluation system. These factors are:

Lack of comprehensive teacher evaluation policy

A major issue concerning the current teacher evaluation system in the Sultanate of Oman is the lack of a clearly documented, comprehensive teacher evaluation policy that is fully realized by the stakeholders in the Ministry and outside. Lack of a comprehensive evaluation policy caused a great deal of confusion, particularly regarding the purposes, the standards and the procedures of conducting teacher evaluation. One supervisor said: *"There are no formal and regulated goals and procedures that we received from the Ministry that clarify the purposes of teacher evaluation. What we practise in the teacher evaluation process is that we discuss together as supervisors or apply our own general knowledge and expertise to do it"* (1st supervisor). That with no doubt, diminishes the effectiveness of teacher evaluation system in ensuring accountability and promoting teacher professional development.

Lack of competence of evaluators

This deficiency of the evaluators' ability to tackle the issue of teacher evaluation is raised by some teachers as well as evaluators. One teacher said that: *"Although they [evaluators] visit me regularly, they have nothing to provide, and as the Arabic proverb says "One who lacks a thing cannot give it"* (teacher from school 3). The situation is more illustrated by another teacher who said: *Most of the supervisors lack experience and expertise, so how can I accept recognition of such a person. Sometimes, I have to follow his or her suggestions not because I'm convinced but because he has a power and I cannot refuse or ignore his recommendations* (teacher from school 7).

Indeed, teacher evaluation is a tough task and crucial responsibility on the school principals, supervisors, and senior teachers in the Sultanate of Oman and elsewhere. Those who have to evaluate teachers should be prepared per-

fectly for teacher evaluation. This can improve the quality of teaching, enhance student learning, and make evaluation more useful and more objective. This preparation according to one school principal *"should focus on the whole process' stages from selecting the evaluator, monitoring them, to reviewing the validity of the feedback they provide to teachers"* (3rd school principal). And according to one supervisor it is *"granting the evaluators opportunities to pursue their studies for Masters and PhD degree which could be very helpful for them to conduct teacher evaluation in a proper way"* (2nd supervisor). This defect in the evaluators' ability may be attributed to lack of evaluators in-service training, since the role of the evaluators is not merely to judge the performance but also to upgrade the professional growth of the teacher. A key feature of sound teacher evaluation is the focus on effectively training the evaluators (Duke, 1995; Zepeda, 2007; Shinkfield & Stufflebeam, 1996). Any successful teacher evaluation system should include "provisions for requiring evaluators to be knowledgeable about each of the following: a variety of sound teaching techniques, the principles of learning psychology, and the implications of human growth and development for effective teaching" (Shinkfield & Stufflebeam, 1996, p.160).

Evaluators and teachers' attitudes toward evaluation

The teacher and evaluator attitudes towards teacher evaluation policy are a significant element that affects the ability and motivation of the implementers for carrying out the policy. Most informants in this study seem to be enthusiastic about the notion of teacher evaluation policy, but they are suspicious about its implementation in schools. Indeed, all of them agree that teacher evaluation has a potential to advance the student learning if it is well implemented. The interviewees serious concerns come from some issues that impede teachers and implementers from participating effectively in the implementation procedures. These issues include:

- Lack of incentives; although, both material and moral incentives have a potential to encourage teachers to perform well, most of interviewees complain of the lack of incentives system that rewards the competent teacher and in the same time punishes the defaulter.

- Inadequate evaluators' training: As a matter of fact, the interviewees are uncertain and unaware of the evaluator in-service training, the evaluation process, tools, and strategies. When the researcher inquired from one school principal whether she or her senior teachers have attended any training seminar in teacher evaluation or any other area.

"Neither I or senior teachers have attended any seminar that would provide us with the best method for carrying out evaluation. I do not remember any seminars which focus on the methods, strategies and aims of evaluation. Whenever they discussed it, it was not done in depth or planned beforehand." (2nd school principal)

- Heavy burden of administrative duties versus less empowerment. One school principal describes this issue by saying:

"The responsibilities and the work load are too heavy for the school principal to shoulder. I don't mind that the principal does this duty because he is capable enough to do that but at the same time they mandate the principal to do such a thing. It is not enough to say that the principal must do so and so, they should give us power to do that. If we have an authority to hire, fire, reward, and sanction we can do a lot to improve the teaching / learning process. It is not in my capacity to give the teacher even ten Rials as an incentive for his good performance, also, I can't punish any negligent teacher. I feel I am – as a principal- a servant who must do what the leaders want me to do." (1st school principal)

- Lack of teachers and evaluators' commitment toward teacher evaluation system:

According to interviewees, the commitment of teachers and administrators can be demonstrated in several ways; for instance:

- By providing funds, time, and opportunities for evaluators as well as teachers to understand closely the purpose, tools, strategies, and procedures for teacher evaluation. That is in order to engage effectively in teacher evaluation in order to achieve the main purposes; accountability and professional development.
- By recognizing, rewarding and sanctioning a teacher based on his or her performance as in accordance to teacher evaluation results. That certainly would

motivate teachers and evaluators alike to strive for improvement.

- By carrying out periodic reviews of evaluation standards and criteria to ensure sustained alignment with the Ministry's goals.
- By providing continuous monitoring of teacher evaluation process to ensure that principals, supervisors, and senior teachers interpret and employ these standards and criteria aptly in all evaluation reports.

In fact, all aforementioned issues constitute deep dissatisfaction among teachers and evaluators alike as far as the implementation of teacher evaluation system is concerned. Bearing in mind that, the Omani educational system has witnessed tremendous changes in order to cope with the regional and international context. Teacher evaluation as an important tool for promoting teaching and learning process should receive great recognition and attention from the entire staff of the Ministry of Education and decision makers (stakeholders).

CONCLUSION

Teacher evaluation is a significant mean for ensuring accountability and promoting teacher professional development. However, the road to good implementation of teacher evaluation system rarely goes straightforward without challenges and constraints. Teacher evaluation has a potential to strengthen teacher performance and enhance student learning. Teachers' evaluation to fulfil its duty, policy makers, evaluators, and teachers must pay extensive attention to numerous factors involved in the process.

To ensure good impact, teacher evaluation must develop clear, precise, comprehensive standards and criteria that basically delineate how the teacher evaluation is utilized by explaining and estimating teacher performance. In addition, teacher evaluation system must involve all stakeholders in implementing, reviewing, and modifying the system. Teachers must be involved initially in this process.

The system must relate student achievement with teacher performance. Teacher evaluation system needs to adopt clear policies and practices about how to utilize students learning data which is basically not plausible to many stakeholders. Furthermore, support evalua-

tors in their evaluation roles by assisting them to efficiently employ their time and utilize a variety of techniques more importantly. Also administrators and policy makers ought to put in mind the heavy burden of responsibilities on the evaluators' shoulders that usually impede them from fulfilling their roles successfully.

Teacher evaluation also ought to use variable tools, different strategies, and multiple evaluators to collect data related to teacher performance. Teacher evaluation system should avoid adopting the *one-size-fits-all* approach in order to gain an authentic and trustworthy information about teacher practices. In addition, teacher evaluation must address the insufficient teacher in order provide a chance for the school and the society to weed out the bad performance teacher.

Interviewees in this study faced several constraints in implementing teacher evaluation. Some of these obstacles are: Lack of incentives; inadequate evaluators' training; heavy burden of administrative duties versus less empowerment; lack of teachers and evaluators' commitment toward teacher evaluation system. These organizational and technical factors inhibit the performance of teachers and evaluators alike. Teachers and evaluators must be given the needed assistance so that they can focus on evaluation for uninterrupted teacher improvement. Teacher evaluation can be enhanced by considering the organizational and technical factors and in recognizing the intervention between them (Darling-Hammond & Snyder, 2000). Instead of the teachers and evaluators alone, Ministry of Education, district education officers, policy-makers, evaluators, and teachers all could play an important role in any attempt towards providing effective teacher evaluation.

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