Teachers' Performance Appraisal: The Reality of Unified Evaluation for Education Services Officer Implementation in Malaysian Primary Schools

Nor Azuanee Mukhtar [a], Mohd Asri Mohd Noor[b]

*[a,b] Faculty of Management and Economics, University Pendidikan Sultan Idris,
35900 Tanjong Malim, Perak, Malaysia*
Corresponding Author: mohd.asri@fpe.upsi.edu.my

Abstract

The aim and objective of this article is to explore the issues and challenges of performance appraisals from the views and perceptions of teachers in selected Malaysian primary schools based on The Unified Evaluation for Education Services Officer's documents also known as *Penilaian Bersepadu Pegawai Perkhidmatan Pendidikan* (PBPPP). The documents are used as formal documents in teachers' performance appraisal evaluation since 2016. This article attempts to understand the issues of the implementation based on the teachers' experiences on the evaluation conducted by educational leaders in their schools. Performance appraisal is always stigmatized with the element of bias, and it is crucial to have clear perspectives of the teachers' true experiences on the positional of this claim. For the analysis, a single explanatory case study based on qualitative methodology was implemented by adapting deductive thematic analysis method. In order to collect transparent data, semi-structured interview questions were designed using the formal appraisal evaluation form as reference. The selection of informants was using purposive sampling which involved five teachers with working experience between five to 30 years. The analysed data from the interview transcriptions and formal documents were divided into three themes: practice, implementations, leaders' capabilities, and teachers' experiences. Through the data, it is interesting to find that the contrast between the documents implementation and the actual practice carries out in schools. Halo effect is one of the leadership biases which frequently occurred based on the data collected. This study could be a reference to the school and educational leaders to thoroughly examine the reality and capabilities of the school leaders to reduce bias in education service officers' performance appraisal.

Keywords:

Halo Effect, Organizational Justice, Performance Appraisals, Explanatory Design, Teacher

INTRODUCTION

In maintaining positive behaviours within a school environment, organizational justice is considered part of a crucial element to be focused on. In the case of teachers' performance appraisal, this positive working element and environment play a vital role in helping these teachers to perform at their best. This article is exploring the experiences in performance appraisal assessment from five teachers from different in-service experiences.

Performance appraisal has become a topic of interest in the local education scene after six years of the implementation of The Unified Evaluation for Education Service Officer (*Penilaian Bersepadu Pegawai Perkhidmatan Pendidikan)*; also known as PBPPP by the Malaysian Ministry of Education. It was fully implemented in 2016 as an integrated hybrid guidance of formal and informal evaluations for school leaders in performance appraisal management (Sariah, et al., 2015).Despite the in-depth and effective implementation reports, teachers are still sceptical in the processes implied by the educational leaders in schools, and there is still more truth to discover especially on the teachers' views and responses on the assessments done. The position of anything related to the performance appraisals are always controversial due to the reputation of their political sentiments (House, 1973).

The processes involved are supposed to be an effort carried out by the leaders in schools, who are at the same time playing their roles as appraisers. In any circumstances, these leaders need to avoid any acts which will cause discomfort and dissatisfactions among teachers and will lead to organizational conflicts. The distortion in giving the appraisal marks and feedbacks by the educational leaders in schools are very much questioned by the teachers as their subordinates due to the realization of the existence of biasness.

The evaluation involved multiple sensitive elements and the role played by the educational leaders as the evaluators need to meet the expectations from both sides; leaders and teachers (Yusuf, 2003). Teachers are one of the main contributors to the success of a school. Their willingness to provide contributions beyond the leaders' expectations will provide a good image, not just on the school leaders, but also on the school reputations. However, the school needs to have competent leaders who have the ability to lead (Kilic & Yavuz, 2021).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Halo Effect in School Managements

The halo effect is one of the analytical biases which an individual tends to develop on other individuals or a group of people. People will be selective in the information that they received and will react based on the piece of that information relied on their preliminary and general perception (Kim, 2017). In the matter related to teachers' performance appraisal, the evaluation carried out will be affected by whatever impressions developed by the evaluator, which will either give positive or negative consequences. some researchers define it as tendencies of a leader to evaluate an individual under his supervision based on particular traits of his favors (Javidmehr& Ebrahimpour, 2015).

Most leaders with a good 'personal' relationship with their subordinates, and in this case, between leaders in schools and teachers, they will not act and evaluate the teachers in a lower grade of evaluations. Even if the strength possessed by the evaluated individual is very minimum and not at parr, this still will be awarded positively by the leaders. The evaluations can be based on unrelated to work attributes. While for teachers who produced poor outcome of a task given to them, the leaders may find mistakes in all of their future tasks, if they are not in a good 'personal' relationship.

These bias practices lead to errors in performance appraisal evaluations, and teachers with good performances may be victims to the Halo effect. This implicit bias and judgements caused the performance evaluation to be inaccurate and later this will lead to inefficient organization management. It is an unfair evaluation which considers personal attributes as part

of the evaluation points, such as looks and personal work experiences.

Apart from the issues related to biasness, teachers and school leaders need to face another challenge which is related to politics in schools. This challenge is more complicated when dealing with performance appraisal due to the potential of occurrence of corruption and power misused by the leaders (Cohen, 1973). Leaders and leadership are more than just a position. The definition is complex because of the role played by the individual is not merely on himself but it is a responsibility towards many people within the organization (Otazo, 2007)

The appraisal processes that took place in schools should focus on constructivism, which focuses on gaining positivity of any setbacks occurred in the school. Speaking of constructivism, it is very much associated with leadership styles. However, as mentioned earlier, the 'subjective appraisal methods' by the educational leaders in school are always associated with bias judgements and inconsistencies. The accuracy and the appraisal objectivity seem to be very hard to achieve due to multiple negative judgements (Brauckmann & Pashiadis,2011).

The long-term success of a school as an educational institution can only be achieved through good leaders and effective leadership. The success criteria of leaders can be achieved by good communication with the teachers which in many ways will help to improve the organizational conditions (Clarke & O'Donoghue, 2017). The fair and effective performance appraisal process will be done by leaders who manage to undertake the whole process with good management practices. Leaders need to have the ability to address any raising issues and problems with the context served around teachers and schools as well as the community around the schools.

Teachers will obey any instructions and needs of their leaders if the leaders are able to provide fair treatment within the school ground. Leaders need to understand their willingness is based on their potential and abilities to complete a certain task. Such positive relationship between both parties will be merged through trust developed from the authenticity of leadership portrayed by the leaders by the teachers (Luthans & Avolio, 2003).

Leaders Behaviours and Leadership Styles

It is known that the post-covid school conditions had changed the school scene entirely, especially on the human behaviours. The dysfunctional behaviours in working places, such as schools, have become one of the focused topics for the past few years due to the various loss impacts it caused (Baharom, Sharfuddin, and Iqbal, 2017). Educational leaders need to play smart roles in managing schools and their community by not just giving instructions, but they also need to be empathetic.

Behavioural changes occurred in the community, and this article is focusing on the school community, need to seriously be part of the appraisal considerations and holistically managed (Basharat Raza, Sylvie St-Onge & Alia Ahmed, 2022). The reaction of behaviour from the teachers is based on the policy implemented by the school leaders and these leaders need to have strategic objectives and a positive work ethics (Moos, Johansson & Day, 2011)

It is a common practice for leaders to set a high bar or standard of achievement for schools under their leadership. However, the aims need to be instructional because teachers are not merely following orders, but they need to be able to observe examples shown by the leaders (Donohoo, 2018). Any tasks required from the teachers need to be realistic and achievable.

It is generally accepted that leaders in school lead the school through setting up a good example, and this requires good communication between leaders and teachers. Leaders need to be able to provide good motivation apart from keeping a good welfare of the teachers. By these acts, the qualities of good leadership in school can be maintained (Sivakumar,A. & Arun, A., 2019). Their behaviours and reactions towards certain issues happened in schools need to be carefully decided due to their leaders' reputations to keep.

Teachers will be a good follower if the leaders have the ability to lead and share similar interests for the benefit of the organization (Khaola, 2021). This can be achieved through the practice of transformational leadership which are known of it influences towards the loyalty of the teachers as the subordinates (Wang, Goh, Courtright,& Colbert, 2011). Leaders are the key to the success of the schools, and there is no doubt on this based on multiple conducted researches' data (Podsakoff Mackenzie, Paine & Bachrach, 2000).

Justice in Teachers' Performance Appraisals

According to Al-Attas (1995), justice from the Islamic definition is literally means harmonious in relationship, and the harmony can only be gained through mutual trust without any violation of contract between the parties involved. It is an ethic which needs to be possessed by leaders and teachers in conducting their tasks and responsibilities (Farsi,Shiraz, Rodgarnezhad & Anbardan, 2015).

Bias and politics in schools are not two current and alien issues. It is a well-accepted idea that performance appraisal is closely related to these issues, which at certain points, has become a culture. It is unfortunate circumstances that teachers have pre-set in their minds that injustice is openly practiced when dealing with performance appraisal in schools (Yusof, 2001).

It is becoming a paradox and the current appraisal documents were designed to mediate and overcome the matters. The design of the appraisal documents needs to consider several aspects such as the amount contributions, teachers' competency on the task given, as well as the seniority ((Mikkonen, K., *et al.,* 2018) and PBPPP is considered as a holistic tools in appraising teachers' performace appraisals.

METHODOLOGY

As a starting point, it is important for the researcher to analyse the formal appraisal documents of the PBPPP. Apart from preparation in designing the interview questions, the documents analysed led to a clear understanding of the contents and the relationship with any contradicted practices or implementations. Qualitative analysis of single explanatory design was adapted because of the nature of this study which involved investigating and thoroughly understanding the experiences derived from the views expressed by the teachers.

It is true that fair justifications by having both leaders and teacher's perceptions will provide non-bias data (Varouchas,Sicilia & Sanches-Alonso, 2018). However, this article is only focusing on the teachers, as they are the party who are facing the direct impacts of the whole implementation process. The interview questions focused on five aspects; the appraisal practices, implementation, teachers' experiences, organizational justice implications and issues and challenges faced by the teachers.

Data Collection Procedures

Five teachers were involved with this research, and they were selected based on their experiences that they have and their access to the information and data (Yin, 2006). Table 1 demonstrates the range of years of experiences as teachers which are between five to thirty years.

Table 1: Informants involved

Informant	Sex	Age	Working experience
Teacher 1	male	53	30
Teacher 2	male	45	16
Teacher 3	female	39	14
Teacher 4	female	33	10
Teacher 5	female	29	5

This range of years of service helped on the diversity of the data gathered and at the same time, improved the reliability of the data. It is important for this research to find differences of views and perspectives of the teachers, and surely the wide range of services duration will help to provide the dynamic findings. The diverse range of years in service also will provide different narrative based on their experiences and observations.

The interview questions were designed based on the five focusses mentioned earlier, and in total, there were 12 questions used during the interview sessions. The sessions were conducted in two ways, face-to-face interactions and via online platforms of either WhatsApp or Google Meet. The Interviews were recorded and transcribed for the next stage of analysis.

Deductive Thematic Analysis

This deductive analysis involved a six-phase thematic analysis which helps the researcher to provide a systematic data analysis process (Braun & Clarke, 2017). Thematic analysis is a flexible data analysis guide which will help us to have a clear understanding of relationships between the data collections with the findings of the generated themes and at the same time helps to eliminate any unnecessary data. The steps involved are described in Table 2 as follows:

Table 2: Steps in thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2017)

	Descriptions
Step 1	Familiarizing with the standard appraisal documents and the Halo Effect Theory.
Step 2	Generating themes from document analysis and interviews transcriptions.
Step 3 and 4	Initial codes and themes were generated based on the analyzed documents and interviews conducted.
Step 5 and 6	Revising the themes generated from the previous stage before preparing the report. During these stages reliability, validity and trustworthiness are vital considerations to be considered.

Reliability, Validity and Trustworthiness

Two experienced inter-raters who are also teachers helped to examine the transcriptions and the themes given in order to seek reliability, validity, and trustworthiness of the data. Apart from that, it is a need and an effort to avoid any biased sentiments in the data analysis process. These validations are important in any qualitative research (Creswell, 2017). Their selection of criteria was based on their knowledge and experiences in the matter related to teachers' performance appraisals. The details of the raters are as follows:

Table 2: Inter-raters

	Gender	Experience (years)	Age	Positions in school
1	Female	18	44	Senior English teacher
2	Male	30	52	Middle-leader Team member

The agreement rates from the theme were calculated to find the agreements or disagreements of the themes coded from the transcriptions. To calculate the reliability rate, Miles, and Huberman (1994) calculation was referred in Figure 1:

$$\text{Reliability:} \quad \frac{\textit{Number of Agreements (x)}}{\textit{Number of Agreements + Disagreement (12)}} \times 100$$

Figure 1: Reliability rate calculation

Table 3: Reliability rates

Inter Rater	Gender	Coder Reliability Rate
1	Female	100 %
2	Male	75 %

As shown in Table 3, the first inter-rater totally agreed with the responses given by the informants based on the themes used. However, the second rater agreed only 75 percent with the responses given. As a person who is a member of the middle-leader team (MLT) in school, he has the access to both sides of experiences as the first evaluator of teachers' performance appraisal and at the same time he also went through the process of being evaluated by the school leaders.

He justified that teachers and leaders need to have transparent communication and this culture might differ from each school. To fully put flaws based on one-sided views and perception would not give justice to the entire school management and community. Furthermore, according to the second rater, the appraisal evaluation is twice a year. By this, teachers and leaders may plan for review sessions. It is either not practiced as a culture in the school or teachers do not feel it is necessary. He added that researchers also need to consider the numbers of teachers because for a larger school, to personally plan meetings to review individual performance might be difficult due to the time constraints.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Halo Effect Theory was the research main discussion and main frame in setting the focuses and boundaries of the entire research. While for the data analysis, it involved a single-exploratory case study and adaptation of deductive thematic analysis. Qualitative methodologies were adopted due to the intention of the researcher to understand the real issues occurred in the process of the teachers' performance appraisals. The findings from this research are divided into three themes based on the data gathered from the interview sessions. The themes are the implementation of the leaders' instructions, leaders' capabilities, and teachers' experiences with the leaders in their schools.

The Implementation of The Teachers' Performance Appraisal Versus Leaders' Capabilities

Many interesting facts were given during the response in the interview sessions. From the responses given by the teachers, it is clear that the standard document of PBPPP is well accepted. However, the issues occurred during the field implementation by the leaders in schools. During the interviews, teachers mentioned that the processes involved, and the instructions given, were not in sequence and there were some internal conflicts that happened along the way.

> *"I don't think it's parallel…especially the curriculum. As for other part, we can see it (is clearly distributed). We can evaluate for ourselves because we did the works."*

> *"I think not. It's only on paper. May be the filling is there but they do not check if that thing happened or not".*

The two quotations above show that the decisions made were not clearly discussed and reviewed between leaders and teachers which leads to the second theme: the leadership capabilities. The incapable leaders in delivering certain instructions had caused some information were not fully comprehended by the teachers and lack of reliability in the implementations. At the end, decisions made within the organization will be poorly managed (Wagner, 1991), and teachers will be the people who feel the direct effect. There are mixed feelings shown by the teachers in relation to the way leaders practice performance appraisal. In dealing with this, here are some responses collected:

> *"Only once a year. when it's time to collect. That's the time he (the leader) will give the details…so the effectiveness is not clearly seen".*

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"I think it's only on paper. May be. The 'filling-in' the form is done but they do not bother to review".

The quotations proves that there is lack of detailed instructions given by the leaders in the practices of performing the appraisals. This had caused unsatisfied sentiments among the teachers. It shows that the school leaders are more focusing on performance management, and not on measuring the performance itself. In other words, they are focusing on the results of the school achievements rather than the teachers' performance as individuals (Gerrish, 2016).

Teachers' Experiences

Leaders are the central of reference of organizational justice (Nielson., Christensen, Finnes, & Knardahl, 2018). Leaders need to juggle between the leadership capabilities and organizational justice carefully bacause any lack of both may cause a severe damage either on the teachers' sides or the management reputations. The responses from the teachers in the related matter however gave us a staggering perceptions.

"As for now, I have to accept even the feeling of not satisfied is there…"

"The appraisal award is awarded not to the right person, and this is unfair for teachers who fully committed".

At some point, we can sense that are the frustration expressed by these teachers, but there are no proper channel and ways for them to discuss the matters. The issue that can be pointed out in this matter is whether the leaders are competent to lead the school as an organization or not. One of the statements is listed below.

"Sometimes confusing things happened. Leaders were describing things differently from teachers. so, when we are filling in the appraisal evaluation form, everything is confusing".

Teachers were describing their experiences on the performance appraisal conducted as unpleasant experiences and full of conflicts. The processes involved were not transparent and political bias were openly practiced. Bias in performance appraisal leads the leaders into a difficult situation to make any decisions, and leaders will have a great tendency of creating errors in matters such as selecting teachers for an appraisal reward (Moers, 2005). As stated in a quotation from the collected data:

"Yes, 'Politic' has its role which caused the outstanding award was given to unqualified teachers".

The data from the analysed themes had given this research quite a tremendous mixed feeling and shocking experiences whether PBPPP has successfully understood, and well

accepted, or merely done for the sake of procedural instructions by the Ministry of Education. The generated themes were designed to establish the positional implementations and implications of the appraisal processed, and yet teachers' response was more on internal issues and domestic challenges going on in the appraisal implementation.

As for the documents used as references for the teachers' performance appraisals were claimed to be holistic in terms of the procedures and process, the highlight now is on the capabilities of the leaders. From the analysis done. It shows that the core issue is leadership competencies and the lack of it had caused multiple conflicts within the management of the schools.

CONCLUSION

The findings from the analysis conducted can be either shocking or interesting. It depends on the context of the focus where the researchers want to point and focus on. However, the dynamic positions in terms of the contradicting opinions between teachers and what had been implemented by the leaders can be clearly seen. It is the fact that teachers' performance appraisal is a powerful tool used to provide positive emotional impacts on teachers, such as providing a positive motivation is undeniable (Davis & Newstrom, 1993).

It is true that in any organization; in this case the schools, leaders need to be fair and treat the teachers with justice. However, these leaders as claimed and experienced by some teachers, are not transparent in the practice of leadership. The Halo Effect is obviously happened in schools in the case of performance appraisals. Teachers need to have a proper channel to report any malpractice occurred because performance appraisals have their long-term effects in teachers' professional development. These incapable leaders will contribute adverse effects by creating teachers with sceptical mind, who will take any instructions for granted because they already have a preconceptual views that their leaders are incompetent (Septian & Putra Astika, 2019).

Performance appraisal will work with a good performance management operation within the school organizations (Obi, 2016). Leaders need to fully function by thoroughly understand their roles in the evaluation processes. However, from the data analysed, teachers gave us opposite reflections of the story. From the findings, the leaders are unable to utilize and manipulate the tools accordingly. In the context of appreciations, rewards and teachers works recognition, the practices are based on bias perceptions.

It is time to act and do something about this. The communication between leaders and teachers needs to be enhanced and at the same time, the selection of the change to leaders needs to be improved in order to restore the trust sentiments between the members of the school. This needs to be done in a careful and thorough approaches. The only way to a better culture is only by having the leaders who are willing to make the first move to change even it will take some time (Ali & Waqar, 2013).

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