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Educators' Perceptions of Developmental Appraisal in Primary Schools

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ABSTRACT The article focuses on developmental appraisal in primary schools in KwaZulu Natal. Apart from a literature review on developmental appraisal in schools, empirical investigation based on quantitative research paradigm was used to collect data from educators regarding their perceptions towards developmental appraisal. From the theoretical and empirical findings of this study, it became clear that the developmental appraisal process plays a vital role in professional socialisation of the educator. There is an agreement between the appraisee and his/her developmental support groups with regard to goals and means of appraisal. This demands a non-threatening atmosphere and trust between those involved in the process. It requires teamwork and team spirit amongst all educators. The study further on revealed that educators understand the aims and significance of developmental appraisal. They feel that it increases the scope for personal achievement and career development. The study further showed that all the schools in the ward have been involved in the training process. However, training in different schools has not taken place in exactly the same way.

INTRODUCTION

The Integrated Quality Management System (IQMS), which is applicable to all public schools and educators in South Africa, was adopted by the Department of Education. This was done to ensure quality education for all by improving the quality of learning and teaching. It is the

responsibility of the Department to provide facilities and resources to support learning and teaching. There are three components of the IQMS, namely:

- Developmental Appraisal
- Performance Measurement, and
- Whole School Evaluation

For the purpose of this article, the focus was on developmental appraisal (DA).

The education system has been subjected to various transformation exercises, which have affected the appraisal of educators at schools. Appraisal has moved from the way in which it was conducted in the past, when bossy inspectors as a judgmental exercise rather than a developmental process implemented it. The assessors focused mainly on fault-finding and judgment instead of including the appraisees in the evaluation process (South Africa 1998).

Many educator unions have felt that inspection was not carried out to improve educators but to destroy them. They have strongly agreed that developmental appraisal has to be conducted in a proper manner. This is also supported by Trethowan (2012) as he mentions that formative appraisal is concerned with helping teachers develop, as opposed to judging them at a given point time.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Developmental appraisal is one of the most important issues in a school as an organisation. It helps educators to realise their strengths and weaknesses and to foster good human relations among all the stakeholders at a school (Wilson 2010). It also encourages good performance in teaching. Wragg (2011) asserts that appraisal is the test of an organisation to make ordinary people perform better than they seem capable of doing and, to bring out whatever strength there is in its members, and to use each person's strength to help all the other members perform. It is, therefore, the task of the school to eliminate individual weaknesses of its staff members.

Buthelezi (2005) is of the opinion that appraisal helps the school to co-ordinate performance and behaviour of its educators towards the attainment of its goals. This also helps them to improve their attitudes, knowledge, understanding and skills in the teaching profession.

In South Africa, developmental appraisal has been made compulsory for all educators teaching in public schools (South Africa 2003). The principal, support staff and the administrative staff are also appraised, but with different criteria as they perform different duties. They are appraised with regard to their own competencies in their work. The aim of developmental appraisal is to facilitate the personal and professional development of educators in order to improve the quality of teaching practice (South Africa 2003). Educators with performance difficulties are given guidance and training. Appraisal helps them to improve their confidence, relations and curriculum delivery.

Turner and Clift (2008) contend that appraisal is one of the most important issues regarding staff development in schools throughout the world. According to Bradley (1991), appraisal comes closer to individual teacher performance, personal qualities and personal beliefs than any other professional activities. He furthermore mentions that appraisal raises questions about the competence of the people who will take part in the process to carry out the intricate task of helping other adults analyse and improve their performance. It requires assurance about confidentiality of information and records which are part of the appraisal process.

Bollington, Hopkins and West (1990) maintain that the introduction of appraisal can be said to reflect a climate in education characterised by concern for improved quality; a greater degree of accountability, and more efficiency, particularly in the use of resources. They furthermore mention that interest in appraisal has risen as a result of increased management training for senior staff as a reflection of the requirements for schools and individuals to set out clearly their aims and objectives. Appraisal develops educators as professionals and improves their quality of teaching as they work with individual learners at school (Wilson 2010). In South Africa, Developmental Appraisal has been designed by the Department of Education in collaboration with various educator organisations. They all agreed that developmental appraisal be implemented in a proper way (South Africa 2003). In July 1998, the principles and practices of appraisal were approved by the Education Labour Relations Council. It was agreed that the appraisal system must have the following features:

- The overall nature of the appraisal system will be in accordance with the pilot study, which was conducted by the Education Policy Unit (EPU) of the University of the Witwatersrand between 1995 and 1996.
- The approach must be developmental.
- Appraisal must be compulsory. It must apply to all levels of personnel within education, both inside the school and in the education departments
- Appraisal must be tied to the nature of job description for all job categories.
- Appraisal must be implemented in all schools by 1999. The whole system must be evaluated in the year 2 000 (South Africa1998).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Population and Sampling

The target population for the article consisted of post-level one educators from the sixteen primary schools in Esikhalenisenkosi, which is one of the four wards that comprise the Umthunzini circuit. The ward has a population of 268 educators with 54 males and 214 females. Females constitute a greater percentage in the ward, namely 80 %, as against a 20 % male complement. Proportional sampling was used to provide for a balanced representation of sub-groups in the population. A sample of one- hundred-and- sixty (160) educators was finally chosen. There were 130 (81%) females and 30 (19%) males.

Research design and instrumentation

In this study the descriptive research design was used. Kumar (2010) also supports this approach because of its relevance in describing the nature of data to be collected and the type of the area under investigation.

This article made use of a questionnaire as a data-gathering instrument. The questionnaire used consisted of five sections, namely, the biographical data of the respondents, significance of developmental appraisal, experience with developmental appraisal, the process of developmental appraisal and general comments.

The researcher considered the questionnaire as the most suitable tool for this study because it provided a vehicle for expression without fear of embarrassment to the respondent. Thus, anonymity of the respondent is guaranteed because their names are not given. The questionnaire items are objective, with no leading suggestions to the responses desired. Traveling and subsistence costs were minimal, as it took the researcher only four days to collect the questionnaires from the educators.

The questionnaire consisted of four sections. This division was based on the grouping of different items which called for related answers. The division of the questionnaire into sections was also effective in providing the necessary sequence.

Section A of the questionnaire was used in the collection of biographic data, which included gender, age, educational qualifications, and work experience and employment status. Section B was about the significance of developmental appraisal, Section C was related to the respondents' experience of developmental appraisal, Section D focused on the process of developmental appraisal while Section E provided for general comments.

The format used in constructing the questionnaire was a two to five point scale:

yes/no, strongly agree, agree, not sure, disagree and strongly disagree options. The choice of this format was motivated by the fact that it included the "not sure" neutral choice. In cases where the "not sure" choice is not included, the respondents often feel compelled to make an incorrect choice or not to respond at all. Great care was taken in constructing the questionnaire in order to ensure the reliability and validity of the study.

Data processing

After all the questionnaires had been received, the important task was then to reduce the mass of data obtained to a format suitable for analysis. The respondents' responses were coded. Frequency distribution was used.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

General and Biographical Profile of the Respondents

Gender of Respondents

Table 1 Gender of Respondents

Table 1 indicates that 19% of the respondents were males and 81% were females. The high percentage of females could be attributed to the fact that women dominate the primary school sector and that lower primary schools constitute a virtually exclusive feminine domain. This gender distribution is historical and was accommodated in the choice of the study. The policy of equality requires that this distribution be changed. However, the process of doing this is likely to be long.

Ages of Respondents

Table 2 Ages of Respondents

Table 2 shows that a large number of educators (48%) ranged between the ages of 31-40. Eleven percent of the respondents were below the age of 30. The educators whose age ranged between 41-50 years constituted only 35 %. Educators ranging from the ages of 51and upwards constituted 6% of the group. This fact suggests that educators from 50 years upwards either occupy senior posts at schools or have accepted senior positions.

Teaching experience of respondents

Table 3 Teaching experience of respondents

Table 3 indicates that 39% of the respondents had a teaching experience of 0-5 years and 20% had 6-10 years' experience. The table also shows that 23% of the respondents had 11-15 years of teaching experience, while 18% of the respondents had 16 years of teaching experience and above. This means that the bulk of educators (+ 60 %) had teaching experience ranging from 6 to16 years or above. It is upon this kind of experience that effective education depends.

Educational qualification of respondents

Table 4 Educational qualification of respondents

According to Table 4, 87% of the educators had college or university diplomas and 11% of them were in possession of senior degree certificates. Only 1% held a Master's degree or postgraduate degree plus further diplomas in education. It is evident from these statistics that educators in the ward are qualified and actively engaged in furthering their studies. This suggests that the respondents have current and updated information about educational matters. None of the respondents had a doctoral degree. The national department of education supports basic qualifications for employment, including enrichment programmes such as the Advanced Certificate of Education (ACE). This discourages educators from engaging themselves in postgraduate study, especially for masters and doctoral degrees.

The significance of developmental appraisal

The responses of the respondents presented in table 4 are discussed under specified headings related to the problem under investigation in Table 5. The purpose of this section was to investigate whether the educators understand the aims and importance of developmental appraisal in the teaching profession.

Responses on the significance of developmental appraisal

Table 5 Responses on the significance of developmental appraisal

According to table 5, 80% of the respondents are of the opinion that developmental appraisal creates unity or teamwork among educators, thirteen percent of the respondents negated the idea, and only 7% were not sure. This indicates that most educators are in favour of developmental appraisal as it is perceived to promote unity among educators.

Table 5 shows that 83% of the respondents agreed that developmental appraisal promotes professional development among educators as it determines areas of strengths and weaknesses and allows them to draw up programmes for individual development. Only 10% of the respondents negated the idea and 7% were not sure. The overwhelming response affirms the purpose of appraisal and indicates the degree of acceptance by educators.

Table 5 indicates that 83% of the respondents agreed that DA promotes the quality of education. Only 8% of the respondents did not support the idea and 9% were not sure. The majority of the respondents attributed significance to the process as a means of upgrading teaching and learning.

According to table 5, 54% of the respondents regard DA as creating misunderstanding among educators. This response is in conflict with the alternative view expressed by a greater percentage of respondents, who affirmed the statement that DA creates a spirit of unity or teamwork among educators.

Thirty-eight percent of the respondents negated the idea that DA is bound to create misunderstanding amongst educators. Only 8% were not sure. But, misunderstanding could occur if the appraisee views appraisal as negative and slanted towards demonstrating shortcomings.

Twenty-five percent of the respondents believed that DA is a time-wasting activity, while 6% were not sure about this. A convincing majority of respondents (69%) negated the statement that DA is a time-wasting activity.

Table 5 indicates that 27% of the respondents have affirmed the idea that DA results in a biased evaluation of educators. Forty-four percent negated the idea and 29 % were not sure. The distribution of responses is an indication that DA is viewed as being more developmental than judgmental. The extent to which the process may be regarded as subjective is a matter opinion.

Table 5 shows that 34 % of the respondents regarded DA as a routine management activity, while 29 % negated this idea. A further 34% of the respondents indicated that they were not sure

about the characterisation of DA as a management activity. It would seem that many educators might not divorce DA from a process of managing performance as a matter of routine.

Responses to open-ended questions

The purpose of this section was to examine other problems that the respondents associated with developmental appraisal and the benefits of this system for themselves (as educators); for teaching and learning, and for education in general. About 45 % of the respondents did not respond to the open-ended questions. This part of the study was employed by the researcher to explore variables that had not been covered by the structured question but might be significant for this investigation. The results were as follows:

Ranking of problems

Table 6 Ranking of problems

Thirty-one percent, of the respondents pointed out that, they needed more training or workshops in appraisal as training looks at training needs across the organisation and either provides or purchases training to meet these needs(Fildler and Cooper 1990). Some respondents did not have adequate understanding of developmental appraisal. Twenty-three percent of them felt that developmental appraisal was time-consuming and had too much paperwork, as they were already overloaded with work. This is supported Wilson (2010), who mentions that appraisal carried out in any organisation takes a lot of time. This poses acute problems in education where, generally, time allocated for management of appraisal is insufficient.

Some respondents were not happy about the time of the year in which classroom observation was conducted. They felt that this must be done during the first or second term so that they could have enough time to improve their weaknesses during the course of the year. They suggested that it must not be done annually because it will then become just a routine exercise, which will automatically lose its purpose, namely, development.

About 15% of the respondents were critical about classroom observation, comparing it with inspection, which is judgmental. They felt that some management teams used it as a weapon to

fight other educators, and suggested that an appraisee must be free to choose a head of department, without paying regard to any specialised learning area or phase.

Ten percent of the respondents felt that appraisal caused conflict among staff members when scores were allocated. Such conflicts can be caused by certain errors, such as the halo effect, unwanted strictness or leniency and stereotyping. Eight percent of the respondents had questions about the validity and reliability of the appraisal instrument.

Two percent of the responses indicated that educators perceived DA as an interference with their work. They mentioned that they were already qualified for their profession; therefore, there is no need for DA. In research conducted by Goba (2002), educators saw no need to have performance appraisal, as they felt that it amounted to a fault-finding mission and served only to challenge the educator's confidence.

Notwithstanding some negative comments about appraisal, few respondents (2 %) acknowledged DA as a positive tool for educators' ongoing growth. They felt that they are not given enough time for development.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In investigating developmental appraisal, this study concludes that well-organised developmental appraisal holds great benefit for individual members of staff, the school as an organisation and education in general. DA is perceived as bringing uniformity in the teaching profession. Most educators are positive about DA, as it encourages professional development and personal initiative. It also facilitates identification and development of their talents.

Developmental appraisal must be viewed as a way of promoting the organisation's ability to accomplish its mission in teaching and learning and also as a means of enhancing staff development and satisfaction. This requires of educators to be well-motivated and to have a sense of ownership for the appraisal process.

RECOMMENDATIONS

From this study the following recommendations are made:

- The provincial department of education must organise re-training programmes for staff development teams to capacitate them to conduct DA workshops with educators in their schools. Some educators have a need for training and re-training since they lack confidence in what they are doing and regard workshops as a routine annual activity at schools. However, if the workshops become merely a routine activity, the process will soon lose its significance in educational institutions.
- Heads of schools must always encourage their educators to be willing to submit to initiatives, which are aimed at development, to help them remain functional. Buthelezi(2005) postulates that, if the principals are willing to ensure that their teachers are developed all the time, the teachers are sure to respond to the demands of their profession. Teachers, in general, are highly responsible individuals, and working alone, they often take sole responsibility for their classes and continually learn from experience.

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Table 1 Gender of Respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Female	130	81
Male	30	19
Total	160.	100

Table 2 Ages of Respondents

Age	Frequency	Percentage
Below 30	18	11
31-40	56	35
41-50	56	35
50 and above	10	6
Total	160	100

Table 3 Teaching experience of respondents

Teaching experience in years	Frequency	Percentage
0-5	63	39
6-10	33	20
11-15	36	23
16 and above	28	18
Total	160	100

Table 4 Educational qualification of respondents

Highest qualification	Frequency	Percentage
REQV 10	00	00
REQV 11	02	01
REQV 12	08	05
REQV 13	46	29
REQV 14	85	53
REQV 15	17	11
REQV 16	02	01
Total	160	100

Table 5 Responses on the significance of developmental appraisal

	Items	SA		A		NS		D		SD		Total	
		<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
	DA promotes professional development among educators	61	38	72	45	11	7	7	4	9	6	160	100
	DA promotes the quality of education	63	39	70	44	15	9	12	8	0	0	160	100
	DA is bound to	27	17	59	37	1	0	47	29	14	9	160	100

	create misunderstanding amongst educators				7	3							0
	DA is a time-wasting activity	15	9	25	16	10	6	77	48	33	21	160	100
	DA is a biased evaluation of educators	5	3	39	24	46	29	45	28	25	16	160	100
	DA is a routine management activity	27	17	27	17	55	34	47	29	4	2	160	100

Table 6 Ranking of problems

RANK	PROBLEM	FREQUENC Y	%
1	Lack of adequate training	27	16
2	Time-consuming	20	12
3	Timing	16	10
4	Inspection	13	08
5	Threat by management teams	10	06
6	It causes conflicts amongst educators	09	05
7	Validity and reliability of the appraisal instrument	07	04

8	Not enough time for appraisal	05	03