



Principals' Perspectives on Teacher Evaluation Reforms in Saudi Arabian Schools: A Review of the Literature

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Abstract

This review of literature examines principals' perspectives on recent teacher evaluation reforms in Saudi Arabian schools, situating these reforms within the broader context of the Kingdom's educational transformation under Vision 2030. While teacher evaluation has become a central mechanism for ensuring instructional quality and accountability worldwide, research specific to how school principals experience and implement these reforms in the Saudi context remains limited. This review traces the historical development of Saudi Arabia's education system, from its early formal establishment through the oil-funded expansion of schools and universities to the introduction of standardized, systematic teacher evaluation under Vision 2030. It then synthesizes existing research on teacher evaluation reforms, organized around principals' leadership role in implementation and the documented effects of evaluation systems on teacher and student outcomes. The review further identifies persistent challenges, including the tension between using evaluation for accountability versus professional growth, constraints on principals' independence and authority, and gaps in evaluation design that leave emotional and developmental dimensions of teaching underaddressed. By consolidating this literature, the review highlights a significant gap: principals' lived perspectives on implementing these reforms are largely absent from the current evidence base. Addressing this gap is essential for informing policy that better supports both accountability and genuine instructional improvement in Saudi Arabian schools.

Keywords: teacher evaluation; school principals; educational reform; Saudi Arabia; Vision 2030; educational leadership

Introduction

This review of literature discusses the various perspectives and implications of the recent reforms in educator evaluation in Saudi Arabian schools, focusing largely on the perspectives of school administrators. This review of literature was part of a qualitative study examining principals' perspectives on teacher evaluation. Teacher evaluation reforms are right now at the very front of educational reform around the world, including inside the educational scene of Saudi Arabian schools (Eissa, 2020). The perspectives of school principals must be taken into consideration as these reforms progress to comprehend the effects on teachers and the educational system as a whole.

The identified problem arises from the realization that there is a significant need to appreciate the extent of the recent changes in teacher evaluation in Saudi Arabian schools, more so from the perspective of school principals. It is especially important to know how these changes are perceived and implemented by school principals because of the huge turnover in instructional methods and the potential consequences for evaluating educators. Therefore, K-12 principals' perceptions are crucial, especially during the introduction of new, comprehensive, high-responsibility educator evaluation policies. Teacher evaluation has now become a popular subject to ensure these policies are effective (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). School principals, in their important position, are directly involved in implementing and managing the evaluation strategies. Consequently, this review aims to identify the challenges faced, milestones accomplished, and opportunities for enhancement due to the recent changes in teacher evaluation practices.

The present literature on teacher evaluation provides valuable insights into the practical and written aspects of these reforms, but still, a huge deficiency of evidence related to the perspective of school principals is present in the area of schools in Saudi Arabia (Bentahar et al.,

2021). This research attempts to fill that gap and provide a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities related to teacher evaluation in Saudi Arabian schools (Alsaleh, 2019). The review is organized around three main areas: the historical development of educational reform in Saudi Arabia, teacher evaluation reforms, and the challenges that complicate effective evaluation practice.

History of Educational Reforms in Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia's education system has transformed significantly since 1932, when it was limited to wealthy city children (Al Maktoum & Al Kaabi, 2024). Today, there are over fifty universities, around 30,000 schools, and numerous colleges open to all citizens, providing free education, books, and health services. While Islam remains central, the system now also includes diverse fields in arts and sciences, preparing citizens for a global economy. Formal primary education began in the 1930s, and by 1951, there were 226 schools. King Saud University was founded in 1957, followed by the Ministry of Education in 1954 and the Ministry of Higher Education in 1975. The first girls' school opened in 1964, and now over half of the 6 million students are female (Education | the Embassy of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 2000).

The oil resources of Saudi Arabia have a great influence on the educational reforms in the state. In 1930, oil was discovered, and by 1970, the government facilitated the educational system through the economy through oil (Allmnakrah & Evers, 2020). The financial support helped to build new schools, universities, and technical institutes to modernize the educational system that has technical and scientific approaches alongside religious education. Over the last two decades, the government has put so much effort into the modernization and advancement of education to meet the economic needs of the modern era (Allmnakrah & Evers, 2020).

Vision 2030 plays an important role in the changes, making the system align with the global educational system. The aim of this vision is the reduction of dependency on oil and the reformation of the educational structure by improving quality, introducing innovation, and preparing graduates who fulfill the demands of the modern workforce.

The education system and structure of Saudi Arabia have been facing very critical reforms during the last two decades. These educational reforms are in vain to match the current demand for education despite the huge financial aid for education reforms provided by the Saudi Government (Tayan, 2017). The Tatweer education reforms were highly framed to improve the quality of teaching by training the teachers in the educational departments in Saudi Arabia in 2007. The main agenda of the Saudi government is the development of Saudi students who would contribute to the economic well-being of the nation, either economically or socially (Alharthi, 2017). However, these educational reforms have not brought sufficient betterment in teaching methodologies and issues of educational administration and leadership (Allmnakrah & Evers, 2020).

The Role of Vision 2030 in Shaping the Education System

Under Vision 2030, the key component of this reformation is the teacher evaluation system. In the past, the system lacked standardization criteria and was informal, but the recent reformation introduced a more systemic approach to teacher evaluation (Al Maktoum & Al Kaabi, 2024). The main purpose of this reformation is to improve the quality of education, provide constructive feedback, and improve the accountability of education (*Saudi Vision 2030: Transforming Higher Education in Saudi Arabia*, 2017). There were certain challenges that teachers, students, and principals faced while adapting new evaluation policies, and they needed to shift their mindset and use effective methodologies.

The evaluation system is based on collaboration with colleagues, educational goals with broader alignment, and professional development.

The Saudi government is currently focusing on understanding the educational system and improving the quality of teaching. The study is based on the personal experiences of the teachers and the point of view of principals, which provides insights into the effectiveness of reformation and identifies the areas that need improvement.

Teacher Evaluation Reforms in Saudi Arabia

Principal Leadership in Evaluation

In Saudi Arabia, teacher evaluation reforms are a critical step in the field of the educational system. Derrington and Campbell (2015) conducted research about implementing a teacher evaluation system for principals, supervisors, and concerned support. They highlighted in their research that principal leadership is the key to the successful implementation of a teacher evaluation system. When it comes to putting teacher evaluation policies into practice and overseeing school workers, principals are essential components of the evaluation system. Studies that take into account principals' worries as well as their impressions of implementation assistance advance the field of leadership studies and practice during accountability and reform.

Grissom and Bartanen (2019) show that the legal atmosphere around teacher evaluation has shifted to promote the continuing employment of outstanding educators and the deselection of those who are ineffective. Successful principals show strategic preservation, and excellent teachers are less likely to leave schools under effective principals.

Teachers who have poor observing scores are more inclined to transfer to schools with able administrators, no matter if their added value score is low or high. Schools with principal change also act in various ways, with strategy retaining trends primarily driven by schools that keep the same principal from year to year.

Effects on Teacher and Student Outcomes

Darling-Hammond et al. (2020) discuss the implications for educational practice of the science of learning and development. A central implication for educators is that this integrated and dynamic developmental system is optimally supported when all aspects of the educational environment help all of the dimensions of the development of children. These reforms seek to reduce the barriers to children's school success, engage free and low-cost services to students and their families, and bring the services to the school. Supervision and evaluation are supposed to enhance education, as teachers have postulated (Dammas, 2020).

Taylor and Tyler's (2012) study investigates the effects of practice-based performance assessment on the effectiveness of teachers. The Teacher Evaluation System (TES) evaluation significantly improves personal teacher efficiency, with students achieving better results throughout the evaluation years (Taylor & Tyler, 2012). The effects are clearer for teachers who get harsh evaluations along with the possibilities for development. The advancement maintains and increases in the year of evaluation, with teachers who have low TES ratings showing the most improvements.

Williams and Hebert (2020) note that tools like Charlotte Danielson's (2013) Framework for Teaching provide professional evaluations of teacher performance and conduct.

These are based on standards observations by educators, provide more feedback on instruction, and encourage strategies that enhance progress for students. Students who interact with qualified instructors are likely to have better grades, regardless of previous academic scores and socioeconomic standing (Ho & Kane, 2013).

Papay et al. (2020) focus on the job of educators in schools, particularly how they learn through their colleagues. Working with higher-performing partners at the institution they attended assisted low-performing instructors in boosting their performance significantly. The research additionally found that educators in treated schools had lower negative assessments upon leaving, showing that collaborative learning might play an important part in the frequently reported benefits of the teaching experience (Papay et al., 2020). Structured classes labeled “professional growth” have become the major means of job instruction for school teachers, yet empirical evidence suggests there is not much impact on the performance of teachers.

Challenges of Teachers’ Evaluation System

Balancing Accountability and Professional Growth

School management has a critical role in promoting teacher education and development, and a thorough search of ideas achieved outside a person’s local or national knowledge is vital when implementing successful teacher evaluation procedures. A teacher evaluation system has two main goals: holding teachers accountable and helping them improve. Combining these two purposes creates confusion and tension, which is a problem seen around the world (OECD, 2020). School principals often have conflicts with their staff because the need to evaluate teachers for accountability can clash with efforts to help them improve, which can harm the school environment (Flores, 2018). This issue is not new and has been discussed for decades (Beck & Murphy, 1993).

Al Maktoum and Al Kaabi (2024) focus on the implementation of motivations during teacher evaluations, particularly a focus on the absence of advantages and their consequences. Many individuals, even those who had received excellent evaluations, stated they received nothing in return. Teacher evaluation has two main purposes: as an assessment measurement as well as a tool promoting development. Standard evaluations and skilled instruction are challenging if not implemented correctly, since they could alter the fundamentals of teaching and ignore environmental factors. Teachers characterized evaluation as brief and superficial, or the assistance they received as inadequate in addressing genuine educational difficulties (Al Maktoum & Al Kaabi, 2024).

Constraints on Independence and Implementation

Teachers in the United Arab Emirates experience challenges when evaluating their skills because of a lack of independence and professional development (Al Maktoum & Al Kaabi, 2024). Principals have an enormous amount of authority in educational institutions, yet convincing them to take part in both summative and formative assessments can be hard and costly. The country's evaluation system will be managed by politicians who do not have the educational experience needed to understand evaluation methods and the effectiveness of teachers (Al Maktoum & Al Kaabi, 2024). The research showed that managers participate in satisfying actions, like making brief inquiries and offering general positive comments. Teachers characterized evaluation as brief and superficial, or the assistance they got as created and inadequate in addressing genuine educational difficulties (Al Maktoum & Al Kaabi, 2024).

Using a system developed by Derrington and Campbell (2015), this research analyzes how new teacher evaluation procedures are carried out in institutions.

Teachers expressed concerns with the state's inadequate time given for educational requirements, greater periods of instruction, and informal interactions. State responses are less clear and more unclear, while local administrators provide support and interaction. According to the results, placing new teacher evaluation requirements into effect requires finding an agreement between organizational personal problems in addition to providing the necessary funding and support.

Gaps in Evaluation Design

Wei et al. (2023) designed an effective tool for the teacher evaluation system. The least frequently used factor to evaluate teachers in educational guidance focuses on how educators develop students' analytical thinking, problem-solving, and communication skills. However, new instructors often find it hard to communicate with students and give feedback, placing a greater value on their performances as teachers than the educational experience of their students. Future evaluations have to emphasize the emotional assistance element to handle mental health and educational worries, as it continues to be underestimated.

Goe et al. (2011) highlighted that educational institutions and districts have been most accountable for teacher evaluation, requiring little government involvement. Governments are going to take on greater responsibilities in ensuring the quality and efficacy of the nation's educational force. Countries must decide what amount of local liberty will be permitted under the evaluation of educators' approach and ways to balance local and state powers to encourage responsibility and shared accountability. Balancing local control and state accountability is crucial; however, states' assistance is limited due to a lack of research methods and templates. The evaluation information may be utilized to determine individual, school, and district requirements, target professional development, evaluate teacher growth, and find possible mentorship.

Conclusion

Figuring out the historical context, advancement, and ramifications of educational changes in Saudi Arabian schools is significant for illuminating evidence-based direction and strategy improvement. By analyzing the difficulties and opportunities related to these changes, this literature review looks to add to the continuous endeavors to improve the nature of training in the country. At the local level, this research plays an important role as it directly affects the work and growth of an educational system. School principals play an important role in making, implementing, and keeping a view of these reforms (Al-Harthi & Al-Mahdy, 2017).

A study done by Taylor and Tyler (2012) states that with a fair process of evaluation, teachers feel more motivated and dedicated to their jobs. The result of teacher evaluation reforms in Saudi Arabia helps to find the areas where improvement is required, which helps policymakers to take necessary measures to overcome problems faced in Saudi Arabian schools and make important adjustments to the educational system (Hakim, 2015). Harris and Sass's (2014) research stated that the evaluation of teachers leads to a gradual increase in students' achievements, and fair evaluation motivates them to work more sincerely.

The perspective of school principals has great significance not just for the improvement of the school but also at the local, state, and global levels. By empowering policymakers, better steps can be taken in the field of education in Saudi Arabia, leading to a more effective and equitable teacher evaluation system. Further exploration is expected to address the restrictions of the current writing and give more far-reaching insights into the viewpoints and experiences of school administrators and instructors.

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