Appraisal Policies to Motivate Teaching – A Case Study in a Vietnamese University

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ABSTRACT The extent of teachers’ motivation to improve the quality of teaching triggered by appraisal policies in The University of Pedagogy in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam (hereafter referred as The University) is explored in this paper. The paper reports on a study of the attitudes of department heads and teachers in The University towards appraisal policies that are one of those used to motivate teachers to improve their teaching quality. It is argued that if those appraisal policies could provide greater incentives to promote teaching, the quality of teaching in The University would be improved.

INTRODUCTION

Since the early 1990s, quality of teaching has become an emerging issue in Vietnamese higher education (HE). There is great concern by the public and the government about the quality of teaching provided by Vietnamese universities. Recent reforms in Vietnamese HE were introduced in 1987. The results have been observed and were reported by Lam (1998). According to Lam’s report, there has been little improvement in the quality of teaching in Vietnamese institutions.

Problems in Vietnamese HE are different from those identified in the West where the focus is on quality assurance. Many of the problems in Vietnamese higher education relate to the quality of teaching such as teaching quality management, teaching methods and approaches, and staff motivation to improve teaching quality. The studies of Berlie (1995), Dang (1997), Lam (1998), and Le (2001) have identified several problems related to university teaching. Emerging from these studies were the teaching appraisal policies. The study reported in this paper focuses on the problem of the lack of effective teaching appraisal policies in Vietnamese universities.

The context: appraisal for teaching - a brief overview of existing policies

According to The University appraisal policies, staff are evaluated and ranked into four levels according to what they have done: non-advanced, advanced (lao dong tien tien), excellence in teaching (giao vien day gioi) department level and university level as shown in the following diagram:
Diagram 1: Level rankings for teaching staff in The University

In Vietnamese higher education (HE), as well as in The University, teachers’ work is usually assessed each semester in their departments. The process is as follows: at the beginning of the school year each department holds a meeting in which the department head allocates work to individual teachers. After that, teachers submit their plan of what they aim to complete to the Head of Department.

At the end of the semester, teachers make written reports on what they have done, based on the semester plan. They then complete a self-assessment and rate themselves in the reports. At the meeting with other peers within their discipline, teachers report the result of their work to all members in the discipline. They then receive their colleagues’ evaluation, which agrees or does not agree with their self-assessment and at this meeting they are ranked the second time. Later, in a department meeting with head of department and all staff members in the department teachers are ranked the third time. The list of teachers in each rank then is submitted to The University, and at this level teachers are formally assessed again and are finally ranked. Each semester advanced teachers are rewarded with a small amount of money (about AuD $10). This is the normal outcome for most teachers. Teachers who are rewarded for "excellence in teaching" receive awards (about AuD $42) for the whole year.

The question posed in this paper is whether the present appraisal policies implemented in Vietnamese universities and the institution surveyed encourage teachers to improve their quality of teaching.
Research on appraisal policies and teacher motivation

A hypothesis arising from research on performance measures is whether improved appraisal policies will lead to improved teacher motivation (Nguyen, 2000). In relation to appraisal policies that motivate teaching, the paper will be mainly based on the research of Dilts, Haber and Bialik (1994), James (1993, 1995, 1997), and McInnis (1996, 2000a, 2000b) as these studies are relevant to the research question posed in this paper.

Appraisal policies
The professional development of higher education (HE) academic staff has always been broadly defined (James, 1997). In Western countries, programs for staff development were created several decades ago in response to growing concerns about the quality of teaching (Greenaway & Harding, 1978). The common approach was to establish specialised units to offer academic staff professional services focusing on teaching skills. Australian universities, especially the larger ones, followed this trend by establishing Academic Development Units. This trend occurred because of a growing interest in the collection of valid and reliable evidence concerning the performance of teaching staff (James, 1997). Researchers (Dilts, Haber and Bialik, 1994; James, 1997) have pointed out that teaching is considered one of the primary missions of HE academic staff. Consequently, they have claimed, it should be a major element in faculty appraisal.

However, according to Dilts, Haber and Bialik (1994), there are few issues in HE that elicit as much controversy as faculty performance appraisal. Self-interest, campus politics and conflicting evidence often cloud the understanding of the goals and processes that combine to make a fair and effective performance appraisal system. Even so, the effectiveness and the fairness of the evaluation system used by an academic institution will do much to shape the culture and the quality of the academic outputs of that organisation (James, 1997). In short, the performance appraisal policy is one of the most important policies constructed and implemented within the academic organisation. Dilts, Haber and Bialik (1994) claim that performance based appraisal systems are an important factor in increasing the overall effectiveness of an academic organisation. The motivation aspects of performance based systems can be an exceedingly important tool in accomplishing the objectives of a university although academics as self-motivated are considered as the main source of staff motivation that will be discussed in the next section.

Dilts, Haber and Bialik (1994) suggest that performance appraisal systems serve three functions within a university. These are, first, to identify and evaluate the performance of individual faculty members; second, to provide incentives for faculty members; and third, to monitor the progress of the institution toward attaining its goals and objectives. With individual performance evaluation, it is not uncommon for universities to have separate procedures for salary increase decisions, promotion and
tenure and for retention decisions. Even in such cases, it is typical that much of the
information relied upon for each decision concerning individual personnel matters
consists of the same evidence. Universities, frequently, establish the procedures for
individual faculty performance appraisal separately from the mechanisms used to
monitor organisational performance. It is also common for the information needed for
the monitoring of organisational performance to be that which is gathered in individual
performance appraisal.

**Teacher motivation**

Motivation is a psychological term for the arousal and maintenance of behaviour
directed towards goals. The goals may be intrinsic - the behaviour itself being
satisfying, or extrinsic - the behaviour resulting in subsequent rewards or avoidance
of subsequent punishment (Rowntree, 1981).

Motivation is considered a powerful source for productivity. Taylor, a founder of
scientific management and Taylorism, spent his whole life finding effective means to
improve manufacturing outputs. Only just before his death in 1915, Taylor found that
human motivation, not just engineered improvements, could alone increase
productivity. Unfortunately, the human factor was ignored by many during his time
(Lewis & Smith, 1994).

According to Good and Brophy (1994), motivation is a hypothetical construct used to
explain the initiation, direction, intensity, and persistence of goal-directed behaviour.
For Walker and Symons (1997:4), motivation consists of "the conditions and
processes that activate, direct, and sustain behaviour". This definition shaped the
research in this project where appraisal policies are considered as contributing to an
'extrinsic motivation' component to upgrade teaching effectiveness. Appraisal policies
may have the potential for powerfully and directly shaping teacher motivation as
described in the diagram below:

**Diagram 2**
With regard to teacher motivation, McKeachie (1997:24) pointed out that department members report they are motivated by, and find satisfaction, in the following: showing helpfulness; a sense of competence - increasing skills, and knowledge; opportunities to use skills and knowledge; opportunities for learning; a sense of making a difference, for example, seeing students develop, interaction with students; open-ended problem solving; autonomy-independence; and the sense of being appreciated by the department Chair, colleagues, and students. Most of these features will be considered as indicators to measure teacher motivation in the current research.

A critical issue to consider, both in improving the quality of university teaching and in developing an effective reward system, is that of motivation to improve. According to McInnis (1996, 2000a), once academic staff are motivated to improve, there are usually plenty of resources available to help them. However, there is considerable debate over what will actually motivate academics to develop their effectiveness as teachers.

It has been asserted that teachers, including teachers in HE, are motivated to teach by the intrinsic satisfaction to be gained from teaching. In other words, the primary motivation of teachers has consistently been found to be an intrinsic drive to help others to learn (McInnis, 1996, 2000a). Supporters of such claims also point out the relatively low salaries offered to teachers at all levels of education (Colbeck, 1992; Lewis, 1993). The results of a national survey of academics in Australia in 1993/1994 (McInnis, 1996, 2000a) showed that satisfaction with the work itself is one of the most important motives for productivity. The findings indicated that despite the increasing workloads and greater demands, teachers were still highly satisfied with their work thanks to the intrinsic rewards they received. McInnis found that HE professors are even more likely than other professionals to be motivated by intrinsic rewards. The study suggested that while this may be desirable from society’s point of view, it leaves academics vulnerable to exploitation by administrators. It also seems to be true in the Vietnamese context, where teachers tend to work because of the expectations and respect from the society (Nguyen, 2000). This orientation of academics has implications for appraisal systems since appraisal does not necessarily provide intrinsic rewards.

A further study of McInnis (2000b) produced similar results: teachers were found to gain significant intrinsic rewards from working in a stimulating, collegial atmosphere, from contact with their students, from a sense that they were contributing to students’s overall growth and development, and from opportunities to exercise professional autonomy. Nevertheless, as McInnis has stressed, teachers can easily
become discouraged, teaching can be demanding, exhausting and frustrating, and for most teachers, teaching for its own sake is an insufficient incentive.

To summarise: the motivation and performance of academic staff is more positively affected by intrinsic and socially derived satisfaction than by extrinsic factors (McInnis, 1996, 2000a), although failure to receive an expected external reward can be seen as de-motivating as a lack of intrinsic rewards. It is argued here that the institutional and organisational climate of a university, including leadership support, will significantly affect the level of intrinsic satisfaction to be gained from teaching. Beside staff intrinsic motivation, acknowledging the importance of extrinsic rewards and the need for affirmation is clearly important for institutional appraisal policies.

Research findings

The empirical study reported here of Vietnamese academics involved a survey and interview program. The target population for this study comprised 140 administrators and teachers within 14 departments among 352 academic staff of The University. Sample was selected randomly. Postal questionnaires were used first for collecting data. They were sent to staff within The Universities. After that in-depth interviews with 8/16 department heads within The University were developed in order to discover more about staff attitudes to the present appraisal policies on teacher motivation. As stated, the guiding question in the questionnaires and interviews was to explore the extent the present appraisal policies implemented in Vietnamese universities and the University encourage teachers to improve their quality of teaching.

The use of quantitative data

From the research findings, results were received from the respondents concerning the extent to which appraisal polices provided by the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) in a Vietnamese university encouraged teachers to be aware of their motivations on items as listed in Table 1.

As can be seen from Table 1, teachers are motivated by self-appraisal (the first 5 items) much more than by peer and department evaluations (the last two items). The highest percentage of teachers who agreed and strongly agreed with the self appraisal policies was in the following section: feeling helpful (50 %); having a sense of competence - increasing skills and knowledge (55.3 %); having opportunities to use skills and knowledge (50.8 %); and having opportunities for learning (47.7 %) and in being autonomous (43.2%).
Table 1: Teachers’ attitudes towards the current appraisal policies regarding teacher motivation. The extent of teachers’ agreement/disagreement with the following statement: The current appraisal policies motivate you and help you to develop your motivation in relation to the following aspects (% responses N=140)

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<tr>
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<th>Strongly Disagree %</th>
<th>Strongly Agree %</th>
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<tr>
<td>They make me feel helpful</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>37.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>They motivate me to have sense of competence - increasing skills, and knowledge</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>18.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>They give me opportunities to use skills and knowledge</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>16.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>They give me opportunities for learning</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>29.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>They help me to have a sense of making a difference, for example, seeing students develop</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>6.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They help me to have a sense of autonomy</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>11.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They provide opportunities to participate in department open-ended problem solving</td>
<td>12.1</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They help me to have the sense of being appreciated by the department head, colleagues and students</td>
<td>22.0</td>
<td>0.8</td>
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A lower number of teachers who agreed or strongly agreed that the current peer and department appraisal policies motivated them and helped them in anticipating department open-ended problem solving (30.3 %), in having a sense of being appreciated by the department head, colleagues and students (27.3 %).

A small percentage of teachers (32.6%) thought that the current appraisal policies helped them to have a sense of making a difference, for example, seeing students develop, while a quarter of them (24.2%) disagreed, and a number of respondents (38%) did not express agreement or disagreement.

From the data, there are relatively equal numbers of teachers either agreed or strongly agreed and disagreed or strongly disagreed with the current appraisal policies. The number of teachers who were “neutral” (had no attitude towards self and peer appraisal) is large. This may be because of the cultural characteristics of the Vietnamese people: no response means no agreement. It may also be because teachers did not pay much attention to whether the current appraisal policies did motivate them to develop their awareness of the listed items. Another possible reason is that teachers do not usually discuss the effect the policies issued by upper levels of management have on them.
Qualitative data
In response to the question: "What do you think of the current appraisal policies? and Do you think that they motivate teachers to improve their teaching quality?", six of the eight heads of department stated that the current appraisal policies were not effective and there was a necessity to have more effective appraisal policies. Regarding the question whether the current appraisal policies encouraged teachers to improve their teaching, all agreed that the appraisal policies did not. A department head reported:

At the beginning of every school year, when teachers hear about what to do in order to be selected for "excellence in teaching", they laugh and ask each other: "what for? They [The University] just want to show that they do it, but they select anyone who wants to be selected. However, no teachers want to get it".

Another department head described a similar situation in his department. He also reported the reason teachers expressed their reaction to present policies:

I don't think that the current appraisal policies do encourage teachers to improve their teaching quality. I think they are no longer appropriate or useful. It is also because the current selection criteria for titles such as "advanced teacher", "excellence in teaching" were issued long ago, and they haven't been updated. As I remember they were issued in the 1980s and revised in 1990s, and now they are no longer appropriate.

The following minority opinion was expressed by two people. They thought that the current appraisal policies did motivate teachers to some extent. However, they preferred the word “encourage” to "motivate", as the latter word related to promotion or a salary rise which was not what teachers mainly expected. It was just a lesser motivation:

Being teachers, we should love our students and put our responsibility first. Teachers consider their duty much more important than money. When working, teachers wish to achieve good outcomes. They want their students to try hard to study, to understand materials as teachers expect.

Another point raised was that teachers preferred to work collaboratively. They did not need anything called "motivation" or literally "favour". What they wanted was equality. That meant if they worked well, The University had to recognise this and treat them accordingly.

If teachers contribute much to education, they are promoted and receive a higher salary. There are many ways to praise them, and those ways should show them that this is because they deserve it, not because they are favoured.

Seven heads of department reported that they did not involve themselves in the process of nomination for awards. The reason was:
many unnecessary problems caused loss of cooperation in the departments. Sometimes people quarrelled because of those ‘ridiculous titles’.

In conclusion, the majority of department heads reported that the way in which appraisal policies were implemented in The University was ineffective. These did not encourage teachers and did not create insights into their teaching. As heads of department reported, teachers’ attitudes towards the title, “advanced teachers”, and “excellence in teaching”, were negative, as they did not consider those titles meaningful and worthy for them to be awarded.

Conclusions

As stated, McInnis (1996, 2000a, 2000b) argued that whatever reason professional staff work for, satisfaction, with the work itself, is one of the most important motives for their productivity. Teachers, as other workers in comparable professions, do provide good service if they are highly motivated.

As the data show, teachers reported that they were motivated not by money or promotion. A significant number of teachers and heads of department, in general, had a negative attitude towards the current appraisal policies. Teachers and heads of department surveyed stated that intrinsic satisfaction was the most important motive for Vietnamese HE teachers to work. In other words, they asserted that most teachers do not work just because of money or titles. Moreover, the money and titles teacher receive each semester are not considered incentives to motivate them.

In summary, only a small number of teachers and heads of department in The University reported that the current appraisal policies motivated them to improve the quality of their teaching to any extent if at all. There are several ineffective details in the current appraisal policies, and they do not create insights into staff teaching. This may result in the consequences that teachers are not evaluated correctly and their quality of teaching is also the problem The University faces at the present time.

Appraisal policies are important as guidelines in an educational organisation. The current appraisal policies on teaching in Vietnam HE at the present time encourage some teachers to a limited extent to improve their teaching quality. It is more likely that teachers in The University do not think the current appraisal policies necessary. Indeed, for a significant number of teachers, they seem inappropriate and do not motivate or encourage teachers to improve the quality of their work.

The qualitative analysis results suggested that teachers’ satisfaction with teaching was influenced mainly by intrinsic rather than extrinsic motivation. Heads of department interviewed showed that teachers considered self-satisfaction more important than external incentive factors. It was argued that the primary motive of teachers has consistently been found to be an intrinsic drive to help others to learn. It
is argued here that this motivation would be enhanced if teachers were motivated by more effective appraisal policies. The development of new and more effective appraisal policies must take these opinions into account if there are to be efforts to improve the quality of teaching in Vietnamese universities.

References


