Faculty Performance Evaluation and Appraisal: A Case from Syria

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Abstract The purpose of this chapter is to broaden our understanding about the issue of performance evaluation and appraisal in the particular context of higher education. Several theoretical issues are discussed, presented and reflected on in a practical case from Syria. The study employs a case study methodology for one of the private universities in Syria. Interviews, documentary analysis and field observation are the data collection techniques utilized. The interviews are semi-structured triangulating findings from three groups of respondents. The findings highlight that several evaluation methods are used. Judgmental evaluation methods are more commonly used in the context of private higher education in Syria. The findings help provide useful insights about the practices related to performance evaluation in that case. Further research could investigate the issue in a wider population including more case studies. People responsible for human resources and performance need to pay attention to standardizing evaluation procedures. They should also empower academic members of staff to be more aware of performance evaluation and its purposes and processes. There is a lack of research on performance evaluation in higher education contexts in Syria which makes this study of key importance to the literature.

Keywords Performance evaluation and appraisal · Human resources management · Syria · Private higher education · Evaluation methods

1 Introduction

The issue of performance evaluations is rapidly gaining significance for many businesses and organizations. Such importance is also witnessed in educational institutions especially those implementing strategies and techniques from the business field (Al-Fattal & Ayoubi, 2012). There has been an urgent need for

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several higher education institutions to adopt and embrace such strategies and techniques in order to correspond to the pressure placed on them by officials and their quality concerns or university rating systems. For example, several quality management systems, such as the well-known ISO (International Standardization Organization), require an institution to evaluate performance. When talking about performance evaluation, there are different levels of evaluation, e.g., organizational, personnel or staff performance. This chapter focuses on evaluating staff performance and more particularly academic members of staff.

There is a current noteworthy trend for educational institutions in the Arab world to improve and develop their teaching staff's performance. Such a trend is powered by several factors, e.g., a desire to improve position or rank on international indices such as the Shanghai Index. Another factor is improving position in local and regional markets in order to attract more or better students (Al-Fattal & Ayoubi, 2013). This, perhaps, is more evident in the private or for-profit institutions. Besides, the fact that educational institutions are service industries (Kotler & Fox, 1995) which place a critical role for its personnel to reflect on the overall success of these organizations. This makes most institutions aware of the importance of investing in their human resources. It has been noticed that most educational institutions in the Arab world import ready-made evaluation and appraisal systems from the West. There is an urgent need to test the applicability of such systems on the Arab culture. Finally, there is a paucity of similar peer-reviewed published research in the Arab World. This chapter is aimed at bridging this particular gap.

The chapter starts by defining performance evaluation and appraisal and linking it to the educational context. The importance of performance evaluation in the educational context is also presented. Then the complications surrounding performance evaluation in education are discussed. This is followed by some discussions on the evaluation process and data collection tools and methods. The final part of the chapter presents an empirical case study on performance evaluation from a private university in Syria.

2 Performance Evaluation and Appraisal

Appraising and evaluating performance is believed to have started early in history yet through informal or unsystematic methods. Khanka (2003) highlights that during World War I the concept started to develop where military people were assessed for merit rating purposes. It is believed that the concept started establishing formal grounds in the business domain in Japan with the quality revolution during the fifties and sixties (Bernardin, 2010). Since then the concept has gone through substantial changes and developments and has become a significant strategic option for organizational improvement and success.

The literature on human resource management provides a number of definitions for performance evaluation and appraisal. There have many attempts to define the term. It is defined as the process of measuring what employees contribute to the organization (Stewart & Brown, 2009). It is the action of determining an employee's work and outcomes in relation to the job in a particular setting. This definition, though comprehensible, lacks depth and purpose. Khanka (2003), on the other hand, defines the term as a systematic and objective assessment of an individual's performance in order to assess the changing needs, potential for promotion, or salary review. It is a way of judging the relative worth or ability of an employee in performing their tasks.

Performance evaluation and appraisal normally involves assessing how an individual employee is doing their job against a set of criteria or standards, e.g., personal competencies, behavioural characteristics or achievements. It also involves providing feedback and creating a development plan. It generates information that may be used for several organizational purposes: (1) Administrative purposes such as rewards, promotions, transfers and terminations, (2) developmental purposes such as training and development, coaching and career planning and possibly (3) research purposes such as validation selection procedures and evaluating the effectiveness of training (Stone, 2011). The evaluation and appraisal process is summarized by Gomez-Mejia, Balkin, and Cardy (2010) as having three categories: Identification, measurement and management of human performance in an organization. In this regard, performance evaluation and appraisal is not limited only to identifying and measuring performance as highlighted earlier by Stewart and Brown (2009); it also reflects on and benefits managerial practices and decisions.

3 Importance of Performance Evaluation and Appraisal

There are several reasons to evaluate employees' performance and the level of competency with which they are performing their jobs. The importance of performance evaluation and appraisal is shown in its uses and applications in an organization. Lunenburg and Ornstein (2004, p. 596), for example, highlight some uses that are related to institutional *effectiveness and efficiency*. Institutions need to check not only their own effectiveness and efficiency but also their employees'. The latest global financial recession and crises has reflected dramatically on many educational institutions. This is most evident at financially independent educational institutions, e.g., British universities or Middle Eastern private universities. With the financial problems and shortage of income at hand, institutions are being encouraged to perform more effectively and efficiently. For example, and as a result, some private institutions adopted a pay-on-merit system (Podgursky & Springer, 2006) where teachers are offered more courses and higher salaries based on the income they generate for their institutions.

Other imperatives for performance management and evaluation relate to supervising employees and *improving their performance*. Evaluation data, for example, might highlight areas of weakness, whether individual or institutional. Particular attention and professional development could be focused on these weaknesses. One strategy to ensure better performance suggests that the process of evaluation should start from the early stages where job performance is usually discussed with an employee during a one-to-one meeting. This could provide a useful opportunity for verbal communication between an institution and its employees. Through these meetings, goals are set for both the employees and the institution. Goals regarding employees are those related to professional development where they usually aspire to develop their skills and competences. Regarding institutional goals, performance evaluation and management establishes objectives for contributing to the departmental and institutional mission. It is also important that an employee's professional development goals and the institutional and departmental ones are geared together for the betterment of the organization and possibly the community. Further and more detailed discussion on the process of conducting evaluation and appraisal is provided later in this chapter.

Other uses for performance evaluation and appraisal relate to *attitudes* about work. Gomez-Mejia et al. (2010) believe that in order to improve employees' job-related attitudes they need first to know where they are in terms of individual performance; only then they can know where they want to go in developing their performance. Lunenburg and Ornstein (2004, p. 596) add that such benchmarking and measurement for performance is usually used to *motivate employees*. It is believed that by doing so as it can encourage competition among staff; it stretches goals to foster innovation (Coleman & Glover, 2010). A commonly used practice in this regard is the 'teacher of the year' award. Some institutions might offer financial incentives for their teacher of the year, yet it is usually the status and emotional uplift that have the higher motivational impact. The 'teacher of the year' initiative has received major criticism especially if wrongly used. The complications and criticism against teacher performance evaluation and appraisal is further discussed in the following section.

Other uses and reasons to evaluate performance relate to the human resources management practices. In other words, data provided from the evaluation aid the human resource or personnel department in *making decisions* (Bernardin, 2010). For example, directors might need information to help them decide who to promote. Other more strategic decisions might include those of staffing or training.

4 Performance Evaluation Complications

There is a considerable amount of criticism of and even *opposition* to the application of performance evaluation and appraisal at educational institutions and more particularly to the teacher's job (Al-Fattal, 2011; Gallagher, 2004; Milanowski, 2004; Ramsden, 1991). A number of ideas support this position. Opposition probably stems from the *nature of the job* and the kind of accountability, liability and authority teachers might enjoy (Avalos & Assael, 2006). This, perhaps, is more evident in Middle Eastern contexts and cultures where teachers and, more specifically, academics enjoy higher hierarchal social positions and their jobs are 'not to be questioned'. For example, several educational institutions in this context are unable to perform such evaluations due to the severe opposition from their academic members of staff. In this instance, opposition occurs from the bottom of the organization (Stone, 2011). However, opposing the evaluation sometimes stems from the top. Perhaps, as members of the top management at educational institutions are educators in the first place, they might carry some prejudice against teacher performance evaluation.

Another complication regarding teacher performance evaluation is related to *employee reaction*. Performance evaluation is a multi-purpose process and these purposes often conflict, probably resulting in the prevention of the evaluation process from achieving its goals and benefits to the institution (Boswell & Boudreau, 2000). One major purpose of the evaluation is to improve performance; nonetheless, evaluation could work against this creating a negative reaction for employees and counterproductive performance (Stewart & Brown, 2009). Among possible undesired reactions, an evaluated employee might react in a relatively defensive or aggressive manner. Such an attitude might be created as an employee might feel s/he is a victim of the higher authorities and being exposed to criticism or even abuse. Middlewood and Cardno (2001) comment that the evaluation process is a sensitive one and if it is not carried out properly it possibly reflects negatively on the institution. Teacher reaction about performance evaluation could also have some *cross-cultural complications*. Academics from different cultures might have different perceptions and attitudes towards performance evaluation. For example, in some cultures, it is not acceptable for a younger person to evaluate an older or more experienced one. It should also be mentioned that evaluation practices are more accepted and used in the West. This could be a result of the long experience in such practices there.

Performance evaluation in other businesses seems less *problematic* than it is in education. It is much more straightforward and easier to evaluate other professionals than it is with teachers. For example, a sales person might be evaluated based on the number of items sold or the revenues s/he generates for the company; a factory worker is evaluated based on the quantity and quality of items s/he produces. In the business of education such measurement is, unfortunately, not possible; the sophisticated nature of the education business presents further complications to the evaluation process. Defining good teaching and a good teacher is not straightforward and has always been a matter of debate (Middlewood & Cardno, 2001). For example, some educators consider teaching as an art and others as a profession. One of the possible complications for this issue results in creating the evaluation forms and measures discussed in a later section. The *complexity* of defining good teaching and the good teacher also relates to the earlier complication regarding culture where different cultures might have different perceptions and attitudes to the teaching job. Different cultures have different expectations of a teacher. Some cultures, for example, perceive good teaching to be the ability to make students achieve higher scores in examinations and other forms of formal assessment; other cultures perceive good teaching to be the ability to develop creative and independent skills for the learners; and other cultures perceive good teaching to be the ability to control students and convey discipline in class

(Al-Fattal, 2010). Between these, different and sometimes conflicting attitudes and perceptions teacher performance evaluation seems truly problematic. Thrupp (1999) criticizes the teacher evaluation process asking the simple question of who is to be blamed when a student fails. Answering this question differs from one culture to another as some might blame the student; other cultures might blame the teacher, school or the system.

One final complication in performance evaluation relates to bias and data error (Khanka, 2003). For example, data collected to evaluate teacher X could be inaccurate and unrepresentative about his/her performance. One bias error is data contamination which occurs when items that should not be measured are included in a teacher's performance evaluation. For instance, some teachers are evaluated or judged by their performance and behaviour during off-work times; for some educational institutions, teachers hired should represent a highly prestigious social role model or figure. In the Middle Eastern context, the case might go even more extreme where a teacher might be asked to leave his/her job because he/she had been seen doing second 'inappropriate' jobs, e.g., taxi-driver, bartender or musician. Another type of error is deficiency. This error occurs when items that should be included in a teacher's performance evaluation are not included. Sometimes evaluators apply these two types of bias error intentionally and others occur accidentally, due to the sophisticated nature of the teaching job mentioned earlier. Perhaps, all these complications mentioned in this section make performance evaluation in the top of the undesirable duties for managers (Stewart & Brown, 2009, p. 292).

5 The Evaluation Process

With all the complications mentioned above it is understood that the performance evaluation of academics is a sensitive issue and the process should be designed and carried out very carefully. It is attention grabbing how the literature sets out different steps for the design process. Bernardin (2010) believes that this variation is a result of the fact that different institutions might perform the process in different manners. However, reflecting on what is mentioned in the literature, it is understood that the six steps are commonly shared between the models. The steps are (1) establishing performance standards, (2) communicating performance evaluation to employees, (3) measuring actual performance, (4) comparing actual performance with standards, (5) discussing the appraisal with the employees and (6) initiating corrective actions (Khanka, 2003).

In the first step, *establishing performance standards*, the supervisor (evaluator) decides what is to be measured, e.g., teaching skills and academic achievements. These standards are usually fed by the job description documents stating the performance and behaviour required of an employee. The standards should be clear and measurable. On the contrary, many institutions make the mistake of producing vague and sometimes extremely brief job description documents. The second step is *communicating the evaluation standards* to employees. This step is important in order to make the employees aware of what is expected of them. For example, at some universities teachers are expected to be available in their offices during non-teaching hours. Office availability, or attendance discipline, might be taken as a performance standard in this case. The following step is *measuring actual performance* where data about the teachers are collected. Different methods of data collection could be used, e.g., classroom observations, student surveys, reports. This stage is a critical and sensitive one as it is vulnerable to error, e.g., evaluator bias or data error. It is extremely important that the evaluator be objective and measure actual performance based on facts and findings. In step four and as data about actual performance are collected they are to be *compared with the evaluation standards*. It is important to check whether or not the employee is meeting the standards and performing what is required of him/her. Any deviation from the standards set out in step one, whether in the negative or the positive direction, should get the evaluator's attention. Results of the comparison are used in the fifth step which is *discussing the appraisal with the teacher*. At this stage, the evaluator communicates the feedback or findings of the appraisal with the employee. Ahmad (2002) believes this stage to be the most critical in the whole process. It is challenging for the evaluators to present an accurate report and make the employee accept it in a constructive manner (Khanka, 2003). This, in fact, is more challenging in the field of education, and more particularly in higher education, as some academics might feel too proud and might respond defensively to any negative opinions. Communicating the appraisal usually provides an opportunity for the employee to realize areas of strength and weakness. The final step in the process is to *initiate corrective actions*. These actions could have different directions. For example, some of these actions might impact on the employee in a direct way, leading for example to internal promotion, financial incentives, or employee termination. Other actions might reflect on the institution's strategies and practices, e.g., developing employee contracting policies, or service development.

6 Types and Methods of Collecting Data

Several types and methods of collecting data to appraise staff performance are used. Each of them have different strengths and weaknesses. Organizations with different preferences might use different methods or approaches. Lunenburg and Ornstein (2004) group these into three categories: The judgmental approach, the absolute standards approach, and the result-oriented approach.

The *judgmental approach* is the oldest approach, whereby the appraiser follows comparison strategies in which s/he compares the employee's performance with other employees. Several traits or behavioural aspects are compared. Within this approach, four main methods are used. (1) The *graphic scale* uses several traits that are assigned values and added up and totalled to indicate and rate an employee. This is usually used with the help of assigned tables or graphs. (2) *Ranking* is another method in which the appraiser ranks employees from best to worst in particular traits and qualities. This method is usually used for promotions or assigning particular tasks (Redman & Wilkinson, 2009). For example, the most organized member of faculty might be assigned to organize a conference for his/her university. (3) *Paired comparison* is also another method in the judgmental approach that is somehow similar to ranking. An appraiser here, however, compares two employees only at the same time to indicate who is superior in a particular area or trait. This method might be helpful in making decisions when selecting a particular member. (4) The final method in this approach is *forced distribution*. In this method, an employee's performance is rated against normal statistical distribution of all other employees' performance. The problem with the judgmental approach is that it allows scope for the appraiser's (or supervisor's) own judgment and subjectivity since it depends heavily on the appraiser's assessment or even opinion. However, this approach could be useful in a particular context, e.g., assessing job performance in an area that is difficult to measure (Stewart & Brown, 2009). This means that this approach could be useful in assessing a teaching job.

The *absolute standards approach* is another significant one in evaluating performance. The main difference in this approach is that an employee's performance is compared not to other employees, but they are compared to and rated against certain established standards. This means that methods and tools in this approach depend on job analysis that will describe actual behaviour necessary for effective performance. There are three main methods within this approach. (1) The *Checklist* is a commonly used method. It requires less effort on the part of the appraiser as it offers a ready list of criteria. However, establishing the list of questions or items might consume more time and effort. Evaluating an employee with the checklist method offers a numerical rating that is used for personal decisions such as salary or promotions (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2004). (2) Another method within the absolute standards approach is the *essay*. This method is very simple; yet time consuming, as the appraiser produces a narrative and descriptive report (essay) about an employee's performance. This report could highlight strengths, weaknesses, potentials and even particular incidents. (3) The *Critical incidents* method in which the appraiser focuses on a key critical behaviour that affects the job performance in a noteworthy manner. Such critical incidents could be effective (positive) or ineffective (negative). These critical incidents, usually done annually, are reported and recorded for later analysis. They might highlight training needs or distinguished performance.

The last category is the *goal-oriented approach*. This approach focuses on evaluating the results achieved rather than the employee's behaviours or qualities. The *goal setting* method is the most common in this approach in which a meeting is held to discuss and set goals. In some cases, goals are set individually (each member is assigned his/her own goals) or collectively (similar goals are assigned for all members of organization). One example of the goal setting method is when teachers are required to achieve high levels of student retention. Another example is that some universities set goals for their academics in publications where they are supposed to publish a particular number (quantity) of research papers. Other universities might require publications in high quality journals with high influence and impact factor ratings (quality). Meeting these goals is a major indicator of a member's performance.

7 The Case Study

This section presents empirical research by means of a case study research strategy. The case study investigates the issue of performance evaluation at one private university in Syria. Different tools are used to collect and triangulate data. These are interviews, documentary analysis and observations. In addition, data are collected from different groups: Administrative members of staff, academic members of staff and students.

Al-Alam University (pseudonym) is a private shareholding university. It has six faculties and has plans to initiate two more in the next two years. It is among the pioneering private universities in Syria since it was licensed in the mid-2000s. It began offering courses four years later. During these four years, there was much work and preparation on all levels and this reflected positively on the university performance; this is most evident in the rapid increase in student population. The university student population in the first years was just a few hundred; however, in 2011 it grew to thousands. The administrative structure, which is large and complicated, has attempted to cater for the rapid growth. There are about two hundred administrative members of staff distributed over several councils, boards and directorates to facilitate the university's work. The administrative structure comprises a board of trustees, a university council, a board of directors, faculty councils, and ten directorates: Admission and enrolment, finance, human resources, information resources, information technologies, maintenance and service, professional training, public relations, quality and accreditation and student affairs.

Regarding academic members of staff, the University has more than 250 teaching members whose teaching ranks range from teacher assistant, teacher, lecturer, assistant professor, associate professor, and professor. The number of academic staff is a key factor as the university claims to offer the best teacher/student ratio compared to other private or even public universities in the country. The University has followed a strategy of recruiting high calibre members of faculty, as this has been helpful in marketing the university and attracting more students. There have been aims at recruiting distinguished, important and well-known people, e.g., former ministers or even public figures. The university competes with other institutions to attract the best academics, bearing in mind the scarcity of qualified personnel for such jobs in Syria. There is a common belief that the high quality of their academic staff is the 'benchmark' that distinguishes this university from competitors. The method and style of teaching used is also significant as most of the academic staff are educated in the West; they speak English fluently and use modern teaching methods. The university claims no influence or nepotism in selecting, recruiting or assigning members of faculty. They are assigned merely on the basis of their merits and established reputation. Meanwhile, the public sector and several other private universities in Syria suffer the severe negative effects of influence and nepotism. Before a new academic member of staff is assigned, he/she is evaluated through certain processes that include extensive interviews, a study of previous work profiles, and in most occasions a presentation demonstrating the capabilities possessed.

7.1 The Evaluation Process

The procedure of evaluating academic performance is delegated to the colleges' deanship, particularly the deans' assistants. Supposedly, the process starts establishing performance standards. The university's performance standards, however, are basically established as 'taken for granted ideas and common knowledge' in the heads of directors. For example, teachers should not be late or miss scheduled classes. As a result, these standards are vaguely and briefly mentioned in some documents, e.g., employment contracts and accreditation documents. It would help the process to have standards better documented. Moving to the next step, communicating standards with academic members of staff is done initially through the employment contracts. Another method of communicating standards is done occasionally through periodical meetings, e.g., departmental meetings. It is understood that the standards are generally implied by these two channels. Sharing standards in a more explicit manner (e.g., one-on-one meetings) might help develop performance and the evaluation process. In some instances, some executives thought sharing standards with academics is unnecessary as these standards are universal and taken for granted. Measuring actual performance is the most critical stage in the process and the university uses several methods to accomplish this. Further discussion on this stage and its data collection methods is presented in the following section. In the fourth stage, comparing actual performance to standards, data collected are analysed to compare with the university standards. However, as the standards are not well documented, this allows more room for subjectivity as the supervisor's opinion about what should be done might differ from one person to the next, or in some instances from one faculty member to another. The final stage is about taking corrective action. These might have some direct effects. For example, an academic member might be asked to change a teaching method. In other instances, he/she might be reminded of the university's regulations about particular 'do's and dont's'. Perhaps, the most important issue that relates to this stage is about renewing employment contracts bearing in mind that in the private sector in Syria such contracts are renewed annually.

7.2 Evaluation Methods and Tools

The Human Resources Department has developed a solid performance evaluation data collection system which includes input from four sources following the judgmental and the absolute approaches. The methods used are critical incident reports, class observations, student course surveys, and informal talks with students. (1) In the *critical incident report*, a supervisor creates a sheet (Word Document) for each member of faculty. This sheet has a table of two columns; one is assigned for positive incidents (titled positives initiatives), and the other column is assigned for negative incidents (titled negative behaviour). A quick review of these sheets shows the number of negative incidents outweighs the positive ones. This could indicate that this tool is more assigned for disciplinary purposes. (2) *Class observation* is another very important tool. This is particularly important for newly assigned members as supervisors need to establish initial ideas about performing in class, teaching methods, and methods of dealing with students. It is an unstructured style of observation where the supervisor does not have a schedule or checklist. Once a class is observed the supervisor produces a document/essay of about 500 words. The document structure and analysis style follows the well-celebrated SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) model. In this regard, it highlights strengths and possible opportunities in an encouraging and supportive manner with the purpose of boosting and empowering such traits and areas. The document also draws on weaknesses and threats with the aim of solving such weaknesses and eliminating such threats. Once a class is observed, the teacher is asked for a meeting with the supervisor, usually on the same day, to discuss the results. Supervisors work on delivering and discussing the results in a positive, supportive and productive manner with academics. In some situations, sensitivity or even tension could be felt, e.g., if the evaluator is younger than the person being evaluated or at a lower academic/scholar level.

The third method is the (3) *student course survey*. Student evaluations of teaching are conducted towards the end of the semesters for each subject taught, to evaluate and assure the quality of in-service faculty. All students express their views of the different faculty members in each subject. There have been several criticisms and concerns about this evaluation tool in the literature (Centra, 1993; Kember et al., 2002; Liaw & Goh, 2003). Among the main concerns are those of bias and relationship between survey scores and learning achievements. The survey is one page following the 5-point Likert scale ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”. It covers twelve items covering areas of receiving support, empowering autonomous learning, knowledge delivery, allowing discussions, having disciplined class, punctuality, office hour availability, assigning and marking homework, speaking English in class, class enjoyment and the overall satisfaction of the course. There is also an open-ended question for students to make comments. On conducting the survey, a member of administrative staff, usually the deans’ secretaries, visits the class. S/he asks the teacher to leave the classroom and wait outside. The person administers the survey starting by telling the students about the questionnaire and about its purposes in developing the university. The whole process takes less than ten minutes. The survey administrator then asks the teacher back to class to continue his/her session. Data from the questionnaires are uploaded into an SPSS file for analysis. Several descriptive and inferential statistical analysis and tests are conducted, e.g., frequencies, means, SDs, ANOVA tests and factor analysis. Following the results, members of faculty are ranked in several themes and areas following the variables in the questionnaire. Unlike the earlier tool, results from this method are not shared with the faculty members. On the other hands, all faculty members expressed a strong desire to know these results. The university, however, does not share the results as the university administration believes that sharing the results might create sensitive and even negative feelings (e.g., rivalry or aggressive and counterproductive competition) among the faculty members.

The last method is (4) *informal talks with students*. In this method, as the university intends to establish 'good and positive' relationships with students, supervisors (e.g., deans, deans' assistants, or head of departments) have casual conversations with students. These conversations could happen anywhere, e.g., student cafeteria, corridors, or university transportations. A supervisor starts by asking a student generally about their studies and the university life. S/he asks about teachers and the ones they prefer and why. Supervisors try not to make the students feel that they are seeking any information to evaluate any member of academic staff as this might reflect negatively on the data. Serious and disciplined students are usually approached in this method, as they are believed to offer more mature and realistic views. The last two methods of data collection, student course surveys and informal talks with students, place heavier weight on students' opinions in evaluating academics. This is possibly because Al-Alam University is a private fee-paying university. It is clear that private educational institutions offer students customer sovereignty (Al-Fattal, 2011). This could be justified as student tuition fees are, probably, the only source of income for the university. It is also important to mention that offering such influence for students to evaluate teachers and academics is very uncommon in Syrian culture. This, perhaps, is a result of the short experience of private education in the country. Members of the faculty have different opinions about this. For example, some academics felt insulted to be evaluated by students. Those people might be the ones who have a longer history in public higher education where such privileges have never been offered to students.

8 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the issue of performance evaluation and appraisal, focusing on a case from the private education sector in Syria. It has shed light on the drive for improving performance on organizational and personnel levels in the higher education context. Performance evaluation for members of faculty has been the particular area of inquiry for the chapter. Performance evaluation and appraisal in this regard is the systematic and objective assessment of an academic's performance; it is a method of judging the relative worth or ability of academics in performing their tasks. The importance of performance evaluation and appraisal is highlighted in reflecting on personnel and organizational performances through improving effectiveness and efficiency. It also reflects on staff attitudes and motivation. This chapter has also presented some complications regarding academic staff members' performance evaluation and appraisal. The major complication relates to the nature of the teaching job and the complexity of defining professional roles. Other complications relate to staff reaction, cross-cultural disparities, and errors. This has been followed by some discussions on the evaluation process and its steps of establishing performance standards, communicating performance evaluation to employees, measuring actual performance, comparing actual performance with standards, discussing the appraisal with the employees and initiating corrective actions. This chapter has also documented some methods of data collection approaches and methods.

The second part of the chapter has presented a case study of a private university in Syria. Performance evaluation of academic members of staff has been investigated through this case study. This section has mainly discussed two issues: The process of evaluation and data collection methods. Matching the findings from the case study to the literature and theory, Al-Alam University has achieved an advanced level in performance evaluation. This also comes as a result of a quick comparison of evaluation practices in other higher education institutions in Syria. No doubt, Al-Alam University's performance evaluation could be developed and improved. The areas requiring improvement are in particular the first two stages in the evaluation process, namely establishing performance standards and communicating performance evaluation to employees. The university is recommended to establish more standardized procedures for these stages. For example, the university council could agree on issuing particular expectations, standards or codes for good practice in this regard. These need to be well communicated to all members of faculty, especially newly assigned ones. One possible practice several institutions could conduct is the orientation programme where newly assigned members are extensively informed about performance expectations, standards and codes through more than one communication channel.

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