

Exploration of the Perceptions of Academic Staff on Performance Appraisals. A Case of Some Selected Private Universities in Lusaka District

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ABSTRACT

Today, universities around the world are largely concerned with the reputation and quality of their universities regardless of location. They have also become competitive within the present turbulent environment. As such, they have a huge responsibility to transfer knowledge to society through highly skilled academic staff. One way universities ensure they have skilled staff is by managing the performance of their academic staff through accurate appraisals which can help determine training needs and increase motivation through the feedback process. This study therefore explored the perceptions of academic staff on performance appraisals in selected private universities in Lusaka district. The study utilized a qualitative approach and data was sourced using open-ended questionnaires from 30 respondents including academic staff and supervisors from five private universities and it was analyzed thematically. Findings showed the prevalence of participatory appraisals but noted varied perceptions among academic staff. While some perceived the appraisals positively and reported improvements in their performance, others expressed dissatisfaction due to infrequent feedback resulting mainly from lack of associated rewards. It was also revealed that academic staff are more likely to perceive appraisals positively if they have desired outcomes. Interestingly, supervisor qualifications did not significantly influence academic staff perceptions. The study suggests aligning appraisal processes with motivational components to enhance academic staff motivation, performance, and job satisfaction.

Keywords: Performance appraisal, Academic staff, Supervisors, Private universities, Effect, Perception

INTRODUCTION

Performance appraisals play a crucial role in evaluating the performance of academic staff in educational institutions. The background of the study emphasizes the critical role of academic staff in universities worldwide, particularly in Zambia's private universities, where there is a growing demand for quality education. Universities are under pressure to maintain their reputation and quality standards, necessitating the effective management of academic staff performance. Performance appraisal serves as a fundamental tool for assessing and enhancing academic staff performance by identifying training needs and fostering motivation through constructive feedback (Maund, 2002; Silwamba and Daka, 2021).

Despite the implementation of performance appraisal systems in Zambia's civil service since 1997, studies have revealed inconsistencies in their utilization and effectiveness, particularly within private universities.

Research by Kamfwa (2016) uncovered that the Annual Performance Appraisal System (APAS) was not effectively utilized in evaluating performance or informing human resource decisions within selected ministries of Zambia's Civil Service. Suggesting a lack of consistency in implementing standardized appraisal systems and this led to negative perceptions of the appraisals.

Further intensifying the issue, a recent survey conducted by the Zambia Private Universities Academic Staff Association (ZAPUASA) in 2021 revealed that only a mere 25% of academic staff in private universities underwent a formal performance appraisal process that provided comprehensive feedback. Notably, within this subset, only 10% represented part-time lecturers, indicating a significant oversight in involving this demographic in the appraisal process.

While performance appraisal is recognized as a crucial metric for gauging employee performance and fostering job satisfaction and productivity according to Nyaoga, Magutu & Kipchumbu (2010) and Lungu and Daka (2022), there exists a visible gap in research dedicated to exploring how performance appraisals influence academic staff performance specifically within Zambia's private universities. The substantial increase in the number of private universities, notably in Lusaka, as indicated by the Zambia Higher Education Authority's (HEA) report of that there is a presence of 50 registered private universities in Zambia, further emphasizes the need to understand the dynamics of performance appraisals and how academic staff perceive them. This study tried to address this gap and contribute to a better understanding of how performance appraisals shape the job performance of academic professionals in Zambia's private universities, amidst a landscape of escalating competition and demand for high-caliber staff.

Statement of the Problem

In Zambia, private universities play a crucial role in providing higher education and contributing to national development. However, the effectiveness of academic staff within these institutions is contingent upon various factors, including the performance appraisal systems in place. Despite the significance of performance appraisals, there is a lack of comprehensive research on academic staff perceive performance appraisals in private universities in Zambia, particularly within Lusaka District. Moreover, existing research within higher education has predominantly focused on the utility and importance of performance appraisals in increasing employee job satisfaction in other geographical contexts, with limited attention given to perceptions of academic staff on performance appraisals in Zambia's private universities. The lack of such tailored insights presents a significant challenge for optimizing performance management strategies in private universities. As highlighted by Grote (2011) that inadequately conducted performance appraisals risk undermining organizational credibility and effectiveness. Therefore, there was need for extensive research into how academic staff perceive appraisals performance appraisal on academic staff performance in selected private universities in Lusaka district.

Research Objectives

1. To assess academic staff perceptions on Performance Appraisal Systems in selected private universities of Lusaka District.
2. To propose ways of improving academic staff performance through feedback from performance appraisals.

Theoretical Framework

To further guide this study, two motivational theories developed by Vroom and Locke were used to understand the link between perceptions of academic staff on performance appraisal and their performance. These theories are the Expectancy theory and the Goal setting theory.

Expectancy Theory

In this study, the expectancy theory according to Vroom (1964), serves as a guide to examine how academic staff perceive the link between performance appraisals and their outcomes within private universities. Firstly, the expectancy component delves into assessing academic staff's beliefs regarding the likelihood that their efforts in the performance appraisal process will lead to desirable outcomes, such as promotions or professional development opportunities. Secondly, the instrumentality aspect explores academic staff's perceptions of the direct relationship between their performance appraisal ratings and the attainment of desired outcomes. Lastly, the valence dimension evaluates the value that academic staff place on the potential outcomes resulting from the performance appraisal process. By applying this theory, the study aimed to uncover insights into how academic staff's perceptions of performance appraisals are shaped by their expectations, beliefs, and values regarding appraisal outcomes, thereby informing strategies to enhance the effectiveness and acceptance of performance appraisal systems in private universities.

Goal setting theory

Similarly, the Goal Setting Theory, introduced by Locke, posits that providing clear and specific objectives to employees fosters motivation and engagement in their work. According to this theory, when academic staff understand their goals and how to achieve them within specified deadlines, they are more motivated to excel. Locke & Latham (2006) emphasized the importance of goal clarity, commitment to goals, prompt feedback, and task complexity in enhancing the likelihood of success. Chiwoya and Daka (2022) also discovered that teachers in Private schools perform better because they are satisfied by the level of motivation they receive from the services provided by the owners of the schools. This theory highlights the integral role of setting achievable goals and providing clear expectations before evaluating academic staff performance.

Both theories emphasize the interplay between motivation and performance within organizations, emphasizing the importance of meeting individual needs and setting clear goals to enhance academic staff motivation and productivity. Their implications extend to the design and implementation of performance appraisal systems, advocating for strategies that align with these motivational theories to optimize academic staff performance. In the context of this study, the adoption of the Expectancy Theory and Goal Setting Theory as theoretical frameworks offered valuable insights into understanding the dynamics of performance appraisals and how academic staff perceive them.

Ultimately, these two theories tried to explain the factors that can motivate and satisfy academic staff such as providing them with rewards and recognition post-appraisal and setting specific goals to increase motivation and performance. Both theories have important implications for the design of performance appraisal systems. They also provided insight into creating a model that can be used to implement performance appraisals effectively. As it was demonstrated in this study, the concepts and theoretical underpinnings of performance appraisals, their operations and academic staff perceptions are indistinguishable, hence the adoption of these theories of motivation as the framework of this study.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Historical development of performance appraisal system in Zambia

In Zambia, Performance Appraisal Systems can be traced from 1993 when they were introduced to improve service delivery. However, the Annual Confidential Report (ACR) was used, and this was based on Personal observation and perception of the rater which had been passed down from the British Colonial Administration (GRZ, 1997). Nevertheless, the ACR was not objective because it was based on the

supervisor's personal observation and perception of an individual and because this appraisal tool was not based on work planning and goal setting, it lacked a baseline for performance delivery. The ACR was later discovered to be one-sided because the appraisee did not have access to or input into the entire process because the manager or supervisors had to do it all without the input and contribution of the one being appraised.

As a result, in 1997, the Zambian government implemented the Annual Performance Appraisal System as part of the Performance Management Package (PMP), with the primary goal of introducing a culture of work planning and target setting in government, ministries, and other spending agencies (Kamfwa, 2016). The goals were to improve the Public Service' efficiency and effectiveness in carrying out its functions, as well as to put in place an effective personal appraisal instrument for making critical personnel decisions and since then, measuring performance in service delivery of the public sector in Zambia has continued to expand over the past 20 years and has been the order of the day (Kanchebele, 2012).

Employee perceptions toward Performance Appraisal Systems

The way employees view performance appraisal has a critical role in the way they reason, construe situations, and perform tasks. It also influences their life attitudes and feelings in organizations. According to Mulins (2010), attitude towards something forms the basis of organizational behaviour. Therefore, it is important that academic staff are aware of what is expected of them on the job. Supervisors must be able to determine which performance appraisal tools may cause organizational problems and result in negative attitude.

Performance appraisal systems have been the focus of several management studies. However, there is limited research on the experiences and views of academic staff on the appraisal systems, particularly on justice and perceived impact on academic staff performance in private universities in Zambia. In a study of perceptions of employees in some selected public and private organizations in Lagos Nigeria, Ikemefuna & Chidi (2012) reported that there was substantial agreement that a performance appraisal is an essential tool for organizational development and that it serves as a basis for managing employee performance.

They also reported that performance appraisal was used for identifying training and development needs. The study concluded that many workers perceived performance appraisal negatively, because of inherent errors in the appraisal process such as the halo-effect, favoritism, and stereotyping. However, the researchers recommended that more attention should be paid to issues dealing with appraisal politics and pursuance of fairness and transparency and that all efforts should be made to adopt open reporting systems to have a motivational effect on employees.

Boachie-Menash & Seidu (2012) also investigated perceptions about rater's bias and errors in a polytechnic in Ghana. Data was collected from a sample of 140 academic and administrative employees using a semi-structured interview. This study reported that there was a negative perception held by the two categories of employees about performance appraisal. The employees held that the performance appraisal system was affected by subjectivity, influenced by some significant errors, the most common of which were the similarity and halo effect biases. The study reported that there was little employee participation in formulating criteria, performance standards and objectives for the appraisal. The study also reported that employees were not well versed about the time, process, and purpose of performance appraisal.

However, despite the negative attitude that employees had on performance appraisal, most of the employees were committed and willing to submit to the process. Concerning individual career development, most employees viewed the PAS as significant to both their personal career goals as well as the objectives of the polytechnic. The results of this study suggest that the subjectivity, rater errors and biases have significant implication on overall organizational performance and that there is need to provide necessary resources to

make Performance Appraisal effective and efficient in meeting the objectives of performance appraisal. Further, the report suggests that subjectivity, rater errors and biases can have an influence on employee perception on performance appraisal. However, the study was done in a distinct set up from the educational sector while this study was done in private universities.

In a similar study conducted to examine perceptions of public servants in Malaysia towards fairness in appraisal, it was found that perceived fairness of performance appraisal had a significant impact on the employees' satisfaction of performance evaluation (Salleh, Amin, Muda & Halim, 2013). These findings, according to Salleh et al (2013) show that performance appraisal is a valuable tool for influencing attitudes towards institutional commitment where employees are satisfied with the appraisal system.

In another study conducted by Nyeleti et al. (2022) on how head teachers and teachers view APAS in selected primary schools in Lusaka, it was revealed that teachers lacked proper understanding of Annual performance appraisal systems which so led to the development of negative perceptions and attitudes towards the system. The study revealed that many teachers did not see the importance of APAS in their career because the system was perceived as an academic exercise without tangible results. It was further revealed that most teachers were not motivated with appraisal systems echoing findings from a study done by Kamfwa in 2016. Head teachers were not providing proper guidance and initiating programs to build capacity in teachers. From this study it can be noted that the head teachers responsible for appraising teachers lacked necessary skills of evaluating teachers thus jeopardizing the appraisal process. However, the study focused on academic staff in primary schools while this study endeavored to focus on academic staff in selected private universities in Lusaka. From this study, it can also be noted that despite public schools having a standard of performance appraisal, the processes are only conducted for formality and are not used for making human resource decisions.

Dasayanaka, Abeykoon, Ranaweera & Koswatte (2021) also conducted a study on the impact of the performance appraisal on job satisfaction in higher education institutions. It was revealed that most of the academic staff had a pessimistic view of the effectiveness of the present performance appraisal systems used in their universities. From the results, it showed that staff were dissatisfied with the links between the promotions, salary increments, rewards, and developmental needs with their performance because it was believed that Performance Appraisal was highly biased towards the research performance and very little attention was paid to teaching performance. However, most of them were happy with the level of guidance and behaviour of the appraiser and that the feedback received via the performance appraisal was good for them to identify the required personal improvements. From the study, it can be noted that several factors such as the environment, limited academic freedom, poor human resources, and the conducting of PA by the same appraiser for an extended period led to the dissatisfaction of academic staff in the PA used.

From the above literature on the attitude that employees have towards performance appraisal, it can therefore be deduced that employees' views on PAS depend on several factors. Employees are likely to be involved in and supportive of a given PAS if they view the process as a useful source of feedback that helps to improve their performance. Employees can also embrace it if it contributes to their prospects for promotion, salary increase and development. Without employee involvement, the performance appraisal process could become unproductive. Therefore, performance appraisal is necessary for effective assessment and management of academic staff performance in private universities in Zambia. As such, this research also endeavored to find out how academic staff view Performance appraisal systems used in their respective Universities.

Benefits of Performance Appraisal on Academic Staff Performance

As previously stated, performance appraisal is a process that identifies and communicates how employees conduct their jobs while also helping to develop a strategy for streamlining that process. The purpose of

performance reviews is to provide updates on employee performance, identify areas that need training, and develop plans for employee growth. Typically, performance appraisal system is a crucial part for increasing employee motivation.

The performance appraisal system is a fundamental initiative that searches for better, more precise, and more affordable ways to assess work performance and employee motivation. According to Deepa, Palaniswamy, and Kuppusamy (2014), performance appraisal is often regarded as one of the most important human resource management functions. Pointing out that an effective performance appraisal and management system is a crucial part of an organization's human resource management effectiveness.

A study conducted by Wamundila (2020) on the role of performance appraisal in improving employee performance in secondary schools in Zambia explored what managers and supervisors in selected secondary schools benefited from conducting employee performance appraisal. The study concluded that managers were able to gauge teachers who deserved awards and were able to improve the quality of education through Performance Appraisals. In the same vein, teachers also obtained benefits which motivated them to work hard to be promoted. Generally, the study concluded that performance appraisal improves the work output of workers and the objective of an organization. However, the researcher used a mixed method approach while this study was strictly qualitative to understand the perceptions of academic staff on performance appraisal and how it affects their performance. The study settled for a sample of 100 employees within the Ministry of Education whereas this study settled for 30 academic staff in five selected private universities in Lusaka.

Effect of Performance Appraisal Systems on academic staff performance

Nyaoga, Magutu & Kipchumbu (2010) conducted a study on the effectiveness of performance appraisal systems in Kabarak University, Kenya. The study revealed that performance appraisal is the only tangible metric used by an organization to determine the level of performance of its diverse employees. Although most employees were aware of the type of performance appraisal systems used in the University, such systems were not based on any serious formal purpose for which they were designed. The study revealed that the performance appraisal system used was not effective and could not measure employees' performance, hence making it difficult to achieve the intended human resource management objectives.

Deepa, Palaniswamy & Kuppusamy (2014), Mpelo and Daka (2024) and Chizyuka and Daka (2021) added that supervisors are known to evaluate employee performance, but there are several consequences. Supervisors are not always available to conduct employee evaluations because they are often located in a different building or even a different city than the people they supervise. Virtual teams, Internet-connected offices, telecommuting, and other factors cause supervisors to lose touch with their employees more often than in the past 20 or 30 years. There are other issues as well, such as personality conflicts or simply not getting along with some of their employees. This may cause a personal bias for, or against, certain employees that may invalidate the appraisal process if it is significant enough.

METHODOLOGY

The research methodology employed in this study embraced an interpretivism philosophy, recognizing the subjective nature of academic staff experiences with performance appraisal systems in private universities. Utilizing a case study design, the research delved into the real-life context of selected private universities in Lusaka, allowing for a comprehensive exploration of the perceptions of academic staff on performance appraisals. A sample of 30 respondents, comprising supervisors and academic staff from five (5) private universities, was selected through non-probability sampling techniques, including convenience and snowball sampling, driven by accessibility and practical considerations. All respondents were coded.

Data collection involved a combination of primary methods such as online open-ended questionnaires and secondary methods such as literature review. Thematic analysis was employed to interpret qualitative data, ensuring a systematic exploration of patterns and themes within the responses. Trustworthiness was upheld through member checking, triangulation of data sources, and ethical considerations, including informed consent and confidentiality measures. Overall, this rigorous methodology facilitated a comprehensive understanding of the research questions and generated valuable insights for enhancing performance appraisal systems in private university settings.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Types of Performance Appraisals used

The exploration brought to light the existence of diverse performance appraisal systems implemented across selected private universities in Lusaka for assessing academic staff performance. The first theme that emerged was Participatory Method using face to face interactions. In response to queries about how the appraisal process is conducted and which appraisal system was less effective, respondent (S4-Uni3) articulated,

The participatory one (face to face) where the one being appraised is party to the decision being made is effective. The non-participatory could be said to be less effective because ratings are made unilaterally by the supervisor.

Additionally, supervisors were asked how they ensure that the performance appraisal process is fair, unbiased, and transparent. In response, S4-Uni3 expressed that,

It is usually a dialogue between the supervisor and staff. We let those being supervised have a say on whatever rating is being given to them and justify why they should be given anything higher than the proposed one. Besides, they have a right to appeal to the next line of supervision if they feel the appraisal is not just.

Moreover, the findings showed that most supervisors employ identical appraisal tools to assess the performance of both part-time and full-time lecturers within private universities. In response to this approach, respondent (S3-Uni5) articulated,

Yes, everyone has the ability to contribute to the growth and development of the institution; therefore, we use the same measure of evaluation.

Further, supervisors were asked what areas they evaluate in academic staff, respondent (S4-Uni3) stated that,

We evaluate their methods of teaching, for instance if they elicit student participation and promptness in giving feedback after assessments.

The second theme that emerged was Self-Assessment, in that regard respondent S6-Uni1 articulated that,

We evaluate lecturers by giving them appraisal forms to evaluate their own performance against predetermined criteria, thereafter, we set a day to discuss the results with the lecturer. This method encourages self-reflection in the lecturers.

The deduction to be drawn from the above findings is that Private Universities use a diverse array of assessment methods to evaluate academic staff, including participatory performance evaluations and self-assessment. This is in line with the study by Kajala and Daka (2023) who investigated the quality of

education in Private universities and their study revealed that universities use different assessment methods to evaluate their staff. However, there was a lack of understanding among supervisors regarding the different types of performance appraisals. However, after explaining to them the different types of Appraisals, most academic staff favored the 360-degree feedback system, which involves collecting performance data from multiple sources, aligning with findings from a study done by Rafiq, Afzal & Kadim, in 2023, it was revealed that there is a positive correlation between the 360-degree performance appraisal and positive organizational outcomes.

Face-to-face interactions were prevalent emphasizing the crucial role of direct engagement and communication in the evaluation process contrasting with findings from Boachie-Menash & Seidu (2012) study where employee participation during appraisals was minimal. The use of uniform appraisal tools for both part-time and full-time lecturers was also noted. However, to ensure fairness, reflecting the belief that all staff categories contribute equally to the organization. However, this study suggests that tailored appraisals might better account for Academic staff differences in responsibilities, workload and challenges faced.

Use of Data Collected from Performance Appraisals

The findings revealed that data obtained from performance appraisals serves diverse functions within the private universities. The first theme that emerged was promotion and contract renewal. When asked what the data collected from Performance appraisals is used for, respondent S4-Uni3 articulated that,

For full-time lecturers, it informs decision for promotion and for those on part-time, it serves as evidence whether to renew the contract or not.

The second theme that emerged was Provision of Post-Appraisal Development Opportunities. In that regard, respondent S7-Uni4 expressed that,

It is primarily used to pinpoint specific training needs and areas of improvement for academic staff. It is also used for allocating workload and resources efficiently.

Following that, supervisors were asked if they provide academic staff with any support or development opportunities to help them improve their performance following appraisals, respondent S4-Uni3 expressed that,

Yes, we help organize or facilitate in-house training aimed at realigning teaching with new innovations and facilitate further training for full-time staff.

From the above findings, the conclusion that can be drawn is that data collected from appraisals is significant in identifying individual strengths and weaknesses, determining promotions and contract renewals, and identifying training needs aligning with studies emphasizing the role of effective appraisals in organizational outcomes. However, it there was revealed that there is a significant underutilization of the data collected from appraisals, with appraisals often perceived as formalities rather than valuable developmental tools. This agreed with the study by Masonde and Daka (2023) who found out in their study that performance of employees depends on how the organisation utilizes the balanced scorecard. The findings stressed the potential for using appraisal data for important human resource decisions such as succession planning and rewarding exemplary performance.

Academic Staff Perceptions on Performance Appraisal

The findings offered a comprehensive insight into the diverse perceptions surrounding performance appraisals among the academic staff. A variety of viewpoints appeared, revealing that while some academic

staff acknowledge the significance of performance appraisals in enhancing their professional growth, most perceive them as demotivating primarily due to the absence of tangible rewards and training after subjecting them to the lengthy process as well as the inconsistencies in the process. When probed about the fairness and impartiality of the appraisal process, a division in perspectives was discovered. Respondent (AS7-Uni3) articulated,

It's a sheer waste of time, if an organization cannot motivate its employees after subjecting them to such a lengthy process.

On the other hand, respondent (AS17-Uni5) articulated that,

Yes, it is fair. We are allowed to rate ourselves before meeting with our supervisors. This, allows for self-scrutiny and improves our view of the work we put in.

Further, when respondents were asked whether performance appraisals used in their universities, should be linked to rewards and recognitions, maintained as they are, improved or abolished. Most academic staff would like Performance appraisals to be linked to rewards and recognition. Some of the reasons that were articulated by the respondents were that

They should be linked to rewards and recognition as these are good motivators for good performance.

During this study, the researcher also tried to find out the tenure of work of academic staff in their respective organizations along with the number of appraisals they received. In that regard, the findings revealed varying patterns, for instance, some received numerous appraisals within a short period, while others had fewer despite a longer tenure. Some of the respondents worked for 3 years with one appraisal, 2 years with five appraisals, 5 years with ten appraisals, 4 years with one appraisal with another working for 4 years with no appraisal. This shows that there is a group with shorter tenures but multiple appraisals, suggesting a more frequent evaluation cycle or potentially faster career progression. While another group includes longer-tenured academic staff who received either a minimal number of appraisals or an unexpectedly high number, hinting at potential disparities in appraisal practices or variations in managerial approaches. In view of the above, respondent AS2-Uni2 expressed that,

The appraisal is not fairly done because it was only given once for the three years, I have held the post.

From the above, the findings of the study show that private universities do conduct performance appraisals. However, there are inconsistencies and there are hardly any rewards or recognition given to academic staff to motivate them follow appraisals. As such there is a unanimous call for a more direct correlation between appraisal outcomes and tangible rewards or recognition, with the consensus that such alignment would significantly amplify both motivation and performance among the academic staff coupled with consistent appraisals.

Perceptions among academic staff varied, some recognized the importance of performance appraisals for improvement, while others viewed the process as ineffective. Common concerns included inconsistencies in the appraisal system, lack of feedback, and the absence of a direct link to rewards and recognition. This skepticism stems mainly from a perceived lack of alignment between promotions, salary increments, rewards, and developmental opportunities with their performance evaluations. These findings substantiate Vrooms (1959) expectancy theory, which emphasizes that academic staff are more likely to support and perceive performance appraisals positively if they are followed by desired outcomes such as recognition of accomplishments and opportunities for growth and promotion which can ultimately enhance their performance. However, contrary to these principles, the findings of this study suggest that such motivators

are not provided within the academic context. This discrepancy emphasizes the crucial role that extrinsic motivation plays in influencing the performance of academic staff.

The study's findings align with those of Nyeleti et al. (2022) and Mulenga, Daka and Mulenga – Hagane (2024), highlighting varied impacts and misconceptions surrounding performance appraisal systems among academic staff. Like Nyeleti's findings, many respondents viewed performance appraisals as academic exercises without tangible results, indicating a lack of understanding and relevance echoing findings from a study done by Nyeleti et al. (2022) which revealed that appraisals are often viewed as formalities rather than valuable tools. Scepticism regarding the accuracy of feedback to capture the complexity of roles was prevalent in both studies, raising doubts about the credibility of the appraisal process.

However, the goal-setting theory emphasizes that to enhance success rates of appraisals, supervisors need to set up clear achievable objectives for academic staff before their performance can be evaluated. According to the theory, success hinges on several key elements, including the explicit clarity of goals, a shared commitment to achieving them between supervisors and academic staff, and the consistent provision of prompt feedback. Contrary to these principles, the findings of this study show a lack of prior appraisal training for academic staff, which is essential for effectively communicating goals, appraisal processes, and the overall importance of conducting appraisals. This emphasizes the critical need for comprehensive training initiatives to empower academic staff with the necessary knowledge and understanding to actively engage in the performance appraisal process.

Interestingly, supervisor qualifications do not significantly influence staff perceptions, contrasting with a study done by Davis & Mensah (2020) on performance appraisal of employees in tertiary institutions in Winneba, where it was revealed that challenges such as lack of knowledge and skills of appraisers affects the conduct of performance appraisals. Disparities in the frequency of appraisals among staff raises questions about organizational consistency and fairness in evaluation practices.

Effects of Performance Appraisal Feedback on Academic Staff Performance

The study revealed that the feedback from performance appraisals exerted a varied influence on the performance of the staff. While a subset of participants reported concrete enhancements in their performance, credited to the feedback they received, others showed a limited impact. Notably, those displaying improvement attributed their progress not only to positive feedback but also to the support and developmental opportunities provided by their respective institutions. When queried if academic staff receive feedback following appraisals and if they are satisfied or demotivated, responses were diverse. The first theme that emerged was Dissatisfaction of rewards. In that regard, respondent (AS13-Uni5) articulated,

Yes, I get feedback and I am demotivated.

With another respondent expressing that (AS7-Uni3) added that,

Well, I received feedback but there has not been any promotion based on the feedback.

However, others expressed satisfaction in the feedback and increased motivation, considering the feedback as a catalyst for self-improvement, as it necessitated areas for development and refinement. In that regard, respondent (AS17-Uni5) stated that,

I am motivated because it has helped me identify areas, I need to work on to progress in my career.

When asked what changes have been made following appraisal feedback, respondent (AS2-Uni2) articulated,

I have started using pictorial illustrations and videos when lecturing.

With respondent (AS11-Uni5) expressing that,

I have improved on my method of delivery, attitude towards work as well as time management.

When asked if the results from the appraisals accurately reflect their performance in the organization, respondent AS3-Uni2 stated that,

If there are no irregularities, I feel it can.

With respondent AS8-Uni3 articulating that,

Not really, I feel I contribute more than the four or five parameters captured on the performance appraisal.

From the above findings, it can be concluded that there was skepticism among academic staff regarding the accuracy and relevance of appraisal feedback in capturing the complexity of their roles. While some staff found satisfaction and motivation in feedback for self-improvement, others expressed dissatisfaction due to infrequent cycles and the absence of associated rewards resonating with findings from Dasayanaka et al.'s (2021). Findings indicated staff dissatisfaction with the effectiveness of current appraisal systems and the lack of clear links between appraisals and rewards. However, respondents in both studies implemented changes following feedback, such as adopting new teaching methods, time management and identifying areas for career growth. These findings shed light on an important aspect of academic staff motivation, indicating that rewarding academic staff for their exceptional performance can significantly enhance their overall productivity and effectiveness.

Effective Implementation of Performance Appraisal

The graphic representation below visually communicates a holistic model for effective implementation of performance appraisals for both part-time and full-time lecturers, emphasizing the interconnected elements crucial for success in private university settings. To enhance the effectiveness of performance appraisals, it is crucial to begin with clear identification and definition of SMART performance goals. Regular interactive dialogue sessions should be used to communicate these goals and ensure a shared understanding, aligning with the principles of consistent communication advocated by Locke & Latham (2006). Supervisors can utilize interactive appraisal methods such as the 360-degree feedback appraisal system to measure performance effectively. These methods should be tailored to the specific responsibilities of academic staff.

Constructive feedback should be promptly provided post-appraisal to foster a culture of continuous improvement among academic staff. Identifying training and development opportunities is essential to facilitate ongoing growth and improvement in alignment with identified performance areas. Recognizing exemplary performance through a motivational component, such as acknowledgment and rewards based on the expectancy theory, serves as a catalyst for sustained motivation and enhanced performance. This creates a positive and conducive environment for academic staff within the institution. It is important to note that while there is no universal approach, this proposed model can serve as a foundation for a successful implementation of performance appraisals, allowing universities to find and develop solutions that work best for them.

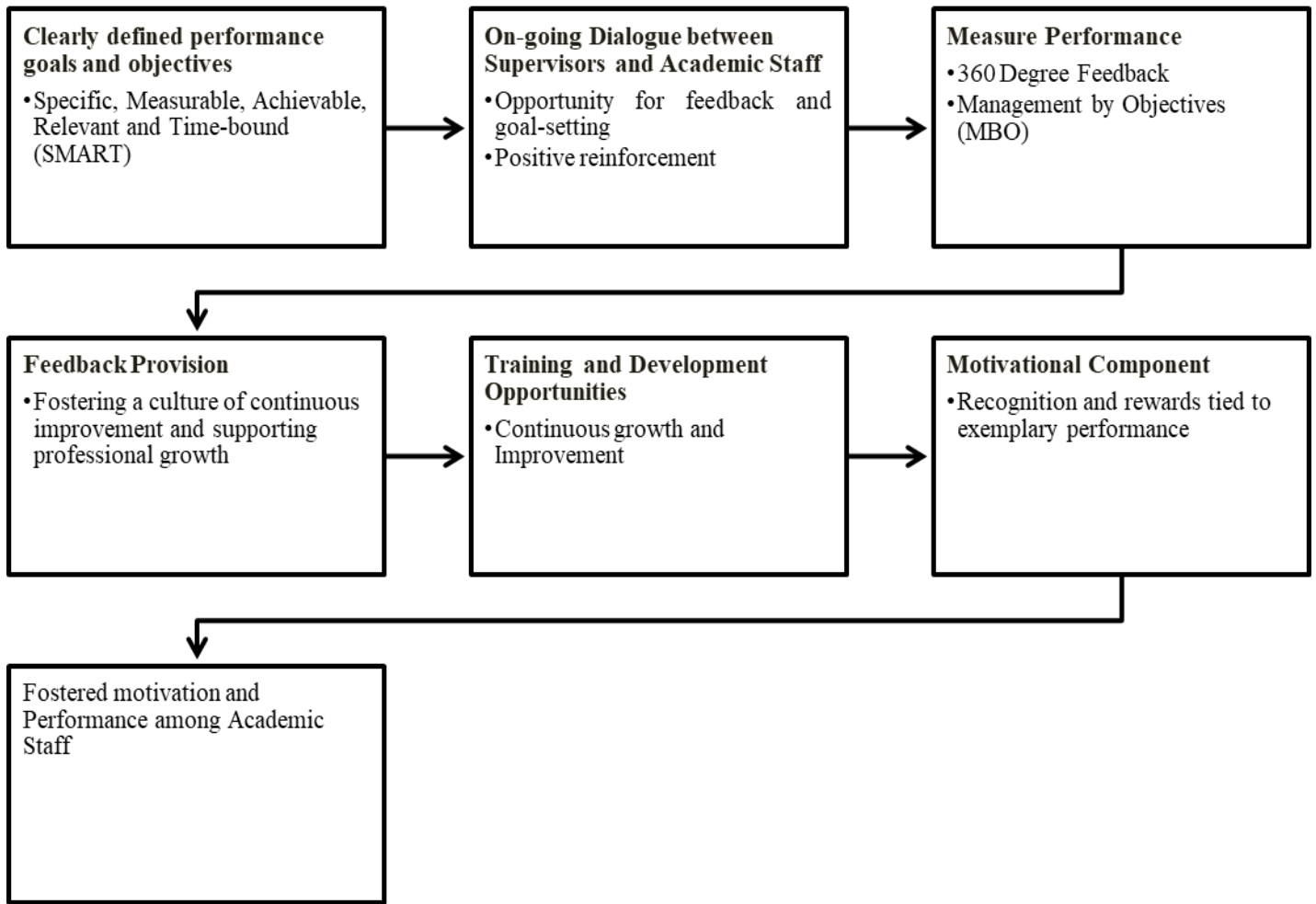


Figure 1: A Model for improving staff Academic performance through Appraisals

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In conclusion, this study explored the perceptions of academic staff on performance appraisals within selected private universities in Lusaka District, revealing a range of perceptions. While some respondents revealed improvements in teaching methods and time management, others reported minimal influence on their performance due to factors like inadequate feedback, infrequent evaluations, and a lack of rewards and recognition. This study aligns with existing research, identifying common challenges such as inconsistent evaluations, lack of comprehensive feedback and a deficiency in post-appraisal rewards and recognition, indicating a potential gap in understanding the appraisal process in both supervisors and academic staff. However, it deviates from other studies by suggesting that supervisor skills and qualifications may not significantly influence academic staff perceptions of performance appraisal. Notably, the study highlighted the important role of rewards and recognition in shaping academic staff perceptions of the appraisal process.

The study emphasizes the necessity of adopting a holistic strategy towards performance evaluation within private academic institutions. This entails rectifying misconceptions by enhancing the precision of feedback, increasing the frequency of appraisals, and ensuring alignment between appraisal systems and organizational objectives and reward structures. Moreover, it highlights the significance of training initiatives aimed at equipping both academic staff and supervisors with the requisite understanding and skills pertaining to the appraisal process. By addressing these critical aspects, performance appraisals can

evolve into more potent instruments for driving both individual and organizational achievements within private universities.

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