

Moving towards a Comprehensive Instructor Performance Appraisal Model for Intensive English Programs

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Abstract

In higher education institutions, various performance appraisal models (PAM) are proposed worldwide for evaluating academic performance. However, these models often prove unsuitable for implementation in Intensive English Programs (IEP) at universities. Therefore, this study aimed to develop an instructor PAM that aligns with accreditation requirements, focuses on instructor autonomy with the end goal of ensuring, maintaining and enhancing educational quality. The study involved 134 English language instructors from the IEP of a state university in Türkiye. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and a survey. Based on the findings of the needs analysis, an Instructor PAM was designed and developed. After instructors received training on the implementation process, they fulfilled the model's requirements during a semester. The model was subsequently evaluated through semi-structured interviews, and areas for revision were discovered. The revised model will undergo implementation for an additional term to finalize its structure.

Keywords: *Instructor performance appraisal; higher education; accreditation; professional development; teacher autonomy*

1. Introduction

A variety of performance appraisal models (PAM) are utilized in higher education institutions (HEI) across the world, aiming to encourage academic productivity by evaluating activities including projects, research studies, publications, designs, exhibitions, patents, citations, proceedings, and awards (Aktan & Gencel, 2010; Hussey & Smith, 2010). Many higher education institutions in Türkiye assess the performance of their academics based on their involvement in these types of academic contributions (Turhan & Erol, 2017). However, such approaches or models of performance appraisal are not well-suited to the Intensive English Programs (IEP) of HEIs offering English medium instruction (EMI) (e.g., Eren & Hamurcu,

2019). This discrepancy arises because IEPs have distinct employment criteria that prioritize teaching experience while typically excluding academic work such as projects, research patterns, publications, or citations. This situation leads to challenges not only in monitoring the performance of foreign language instructors but also in encouraging better performance. Additionally, the lack of such performance-monitoring systems leads the IEP programs to fail to account for quality assurance processes for faculty - an important criterion to be granted or to maintain accreditation (Ataman & Adıgüzel, 2020). Moreover, state universities face a particular challenge because of their contextual and financial conditions (Başbuğ & Ünsal, 2012), making PAMs suited to their affordances a dire need. Even though there have been different PAMs developed in different countries and by different institutions to meet the needs of different groups, it is a tough task to create a common set of procedures to guide instructor appraisal work across different contexts. We believe such a model can become conceivable with professional development (PD) at its core, through careful attention to teacher autonomy to ensure positive outcomes for both instructors and institutions (Dikilitaş & Mumford, 2019; Kennedy, 2014; Yorulmaz & Çolak, 2023).

2. Theoretical Background

PAMs tailored to an institution's culture, objectives, and structure hold significant potential for enhancing educational quality. Accreditation in higher education is recent phenomenon gaining growing recognition internationally (Duarte & Vardasca, 2023; Makhoul, 2019). IEPs seek accreditation to enhance teaching quality and certify the effectiveness of educational processes have emphasized the need for these systems (Ataman & Adıgüzel, 2020) on the way of ensuring and maintaining educational quality while promoting excellence through specific standards (Aktan & Gencel, 2010; Hussey & Smith, 2010). While developing these systems, teacher autonomy, allowing teachers to achieve meaningful growth in their professional learning (Kennedy, 2014), also needs to be considered. Teacher autonomy encompasses making decisions in administrative duties, curricula, teaching methods, and practices. It also promotes social and academic development within classrooms and schools (Gwaltney, 2012); thus, PAMs should support teacher autonomy and pave the way for PD. However, studies addressing this issue in Türkiye have been found scarce (Yorulmaz & Çolak, 2023). Few IEPs in Türkiye have attempted to establish their own PAM and even fewer reported their results. Üstünlüoğlu (2009) examined the implementation and outcomes of a new PAM in a private university's IEP, finding that although instructors initially reacted negatively, they later viewed it positively, even likening it to a remedy. PAMs play a critical role in ensuring PD (Tarhan et al., 2019), therefore, their multifaceted nature needs thorough examination. To address this, Savaş (2021) designed a survey and offered a model to assist development of PAMs for the IEPs in Türkiye. The study proposed a development-oriented PAM to guide the future research and practice with its essential components focusing on teaching, student gains, PD, and institutional duties. Building

on this work, we tried to provide a more comprehensive view of instructors' overall performance, including institutional duties, while highlighting teacher autonomy. We adopted Kennedy's (2005, 2014) model, which categorizes professional development activities based on their support for autonomy. Keeping these two frameworks as guides in mind, we aimed to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the key components of the designed and developed language instructor PAM based on needs analysis and extensive literature research?
2. How did instructors engage with the proposed PAM, and what were their experiences? What revisions did they suggest for further refinement?

3. Method

Research design: A concurrent mixed methods design, incorporating the collection and analysis of both qualitative and quantitative data synchronously was employed in this research.

Context of the study: This study was carried out in the IEP of one of the top-tier state universities in Türkiye. IEPs offer a one-year intensive English language education at EMI universities. To apply for an instructor position in IEPs, individuals must have a bachelor's and a master's degree in the English language-related fields defined by the Council of Higher Education (CoHE). Additionally, state universities may require higher education teaching experience. Besides, candidates must meet minimum score requirements from the exams as defined by the CoHE.

Participants: A total of 134 survey and interview participants who work as English language instructors working in the IEP of a top-tier state university in Türkiye participated in the needs analysis, implementation, and evaluation stages of the study. The participants were selected through clustered sampling.

Instruments: In the needs analysis stage of the study, one focus group was held with five participants and semi-structured interviews were conducted with 14 participants, using two commonly accepted theoretical frameworks, Present Situation Analysis (Robinson, 1991) and Target Situation Analysis (Chambers, 1980). Additionally, 101 participants responded to "In-service Teacher Evaluation Survey" by Savaş, (2021), providing data about their experiences and opinions about performance appraisal practices. In the evaluation stage, 15 post-semi-structured interviews were carried out to evaluate the effectiveness of the PAM following one semester of implementation period.

Procedures: Prior to the research, all participants were provided a consent form and informed about the steps of the research. In the needs analysis stage, the questionnaire (Savaş, 2021), a focus group and individual semi-structured interviews were carried out in the Spring Term of the 2023-2024 Academic Year. To obtain the quantitative data, the questionnaire was sent to all

instructors through an online survey platform and 101 of them responded. Semi-structured interviews took 30-45 minutes, and the focus group lasted for 1.5 hours. Following the analysis of qualitative and quantitative data from needs analysis, a language instructor PAM was designed and developed. Upon developing the model, the piloting stage of the model was initiated. Firstly, the instructors received training that introduced the model and its steps. Following the training, instructors chose and implemented activities from different categories and filled in the required forms to indicate activity completion in the Fall Term of 2024-2025 Academic Year. At the end of the term, they uploaded the related documents into their online personal folders, which were later subject to the scrutiny of the researchers for their suitability. To investigate the application process and revise the model, 14 semi-structured interviews were performed. Revisions will be made in line with the outcomes of these interviews and the revised form of the instructor PAM will be introduced to instructors at the beginning of the Spring Term of the 2024-2025 Academic Year. As this is an ongoing project, this paper only presents the results of the needs analysis and the piloting stage of the study. Throughout the Spring Term of the 2024-2025 Academic Year, instructors will continue to carry out the requirements of the model and their performance will be assessed at the end of the term. Later, awards will be determined in line with input from the instructors. The final form of the model will be shaped in line with data collected by the completion of the implementation process. Figure 1 shows the research process.

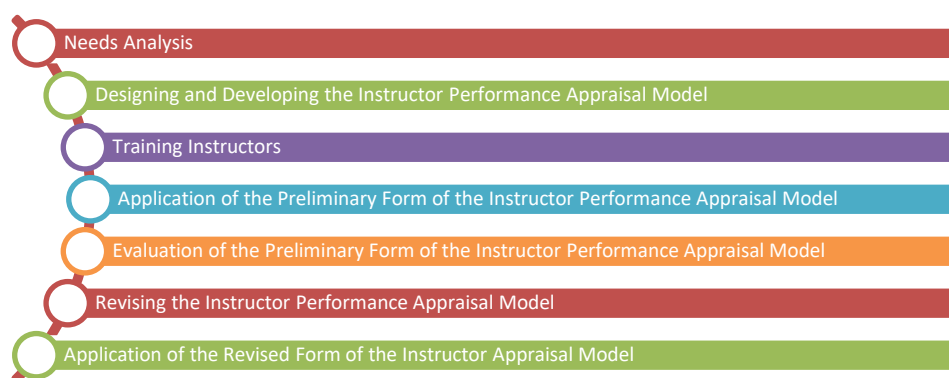


Figure 1. Steps of the research

Data Analysis: For the needs analysis phase, the survey data was processed using SPSS version 26 for descriptive statistics. For the qualitative analysis of the semi-structured interviews and the focus group, thematic analysis was carried out in line with Braun and Clarke (2006). The data were transcribed verbatim, and the documents were examined using MAXQDA to identify recurring codes. To evaluate the preliminary form of the PAM, content analysis was conducted on the data of semi-structured interviews to discover strengths, weaknesses, and suggested improvements on the model.

4. Results

4.1. Design and Development

Needs analysis results revealed that instructors expected a professional development-focused approach to the PAM and believed that the PAM is likely to foster collegial support, boost motivation for PD, and improve both teaching quality and student performance. In this regard, clear guidelines, a compelling rationale, and evidence of its alignment with the principles of teacher autonomy and quality assurance standards should be provided to them during the implementation.

Based on the results of the needs analysis and a detailed investigation of the literature, the purpose statement of the autonomy-based instructor PAM was formulated. In this process, the models of Savaş (2021) and Kennedy (2005) provided guiding lenses as needs analysis results played a more pivotal role to determine the essential features of the initial model. The language instructor PAM consisted of two main categories namely Core Elements and Autonomy-based Continuous Professional Development (CPD) Elements. While the Core Elements solely focused on institutional tasks as described by the institution, autonomy-based CPD elements included CPD tasks under three categories based on their capacity to promote teacher autonomy. These categories are Category 1- Transmissive Activities, Category 2- Transitional Activities, and Category 3- Transformative Activities. Additionally, student evaluations of teaching staff, which are conducted in the context regularly as part of accreditation processes, are added as an additional component. This final component is a supportive element and will only be used if there is a situation requiring a tie-breaker.

The CPD component of the model is designed to have an important impact on determining the higher performers. This component has three categories that bring in increasingly more credentials for their implementers:

Category 1- Transmissive activities position teachers as passive recipients, primarily focusing on equipping them with the necessary skills for various implementations or practices. These activities often involve unsystematic reflections and place minimal emphasis on utilizing their capacity for autonomy. Participation in training sessions offered by external bodies such as attending online or face-to-face workshops and webinars, participation in conferences as a listener, and participation in in-house CPD events are activities listed under this category.

Category 2- Transitional activities, situated between transmission and transformation, are primarily collaborative in nature. Compared to transmissive and transformative approaches, these activities involve a moderate level of professional autonomy. While they do not lead to immediate changes in teaching and learning practices within the classroom, they promote reflective practice. The activities encompass peer observation, teacher exchange, peer coaching, mentoring new instructors, co-teaching, reading groups, community of practice, video recorded lessons, and reflective teaching journals.

Category 3- Transformative activities, representing the highest level of PD, aim to cultivate the highest capacity for professional autonomy. These activities are inquiry-oriented, requiring a critical approach to practice, sustained effort, and meaningful changes in teaching practices. Teachers must adopt a proactive and deliberate approach to CPD, as this category emphasizes a teacher-centered focus. Action research, pedagogical experimentation, workshop delivery, lesson study, presenting a research study at a conference, peer observation, and community of practice are examples of the listed activities.

To guide instructors in the implementation process of the model, detailed explanations, criteria, guidelines, and documents were prepared for each activity under each category. Instructors were distributed these documents, along with how to follow the implementation steps. Additionally, a frequently asked questions document was shared with instructors.

4.2. Implementation and Evaluation

For the implementation stage, out of 134 actively employed instructors during the Fall Term of the 2024–2025 Academic Year, 95 participated in at least one activity across three categories. Nine instructors selected Turkey d activities exclusively from Category 1, while six chose activities solely from Category 3. The majority, 92 instructors, completed activities within Category 2. Additionally, nine instructors engaged in two different activities across two categories, whereas two instructors completed two distinct activities within the same category. In Category 1, eight instructors participated in training sessions conducted by external organizations. Within Category 2, 60 instructors opted for peer observation, 17 engaged in peer collaboration, and eight maintained reflective teaching journals. Only seven instructors participated in teacher exchange programs. In Category 3, two instructors mentored newly hired colleagues, and another two engaged in pedagogical experimentation. Presenting research at a conference and conducting an extended version of peer observation were also reported by one instructor each.

Following the completion of the first semester of implementation process, 14 semi-structured interviews were conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of the developed model and identify areas for further improvement. The results indicated three main themes, namely i) core achievements, ii) areas for improvement, and iii) suggestions for further development. Regarding the core achievements, instructors noted the model was strong in terms of: a) promotion of instructor autonomy, b) enhancing motivation and engagement, c) supportive documentation processes, d) diverse structured CPD activities, and e) well-structured system. As for instructor autonomy, the participants pointed out that the model provided “freedom of choice” in terms of their professional learning, which enabled them to decide on the activity for their own professional growth while reporting that this opportunity increased their motivation for involving in professional development. The documentation and categorization of the activities were also highlighted as for their clear guidance to the participants. Finally, the

participants found the current version of the model “well-structured” in terms of its detailed components and guidance for CPD.

Pertaining to areas for improvement, instructors emphasized several points, which were a) challenges in integrating CPD activities, b) negative perceptions of inquiry-based activities, and c) insufficiency of communication in the appraisal process. The instructors stated they had difficulty in fitting the CPD activities in their busy teaching and other duties. They believed the inquiry-based activities were suitable only for those who have experience in research. They also referred to inadequate clarity and communication between the instructors and the implementers about the process of the new appraisal system as another shortcoming that needed recognition.

For suggestions for further development, a) enhanced ongoing guidance, b) greater focus on students and teaching, and c) shift from semesterly to yearly requirements were identified as subthemes. These findings demonstrated that the steps in the appraisal system needed more clarification in the process of implementation. Additionally, they suggested further inclusion of student- and teaching-focused components which would provide better opportunities for non-academically motivated staff. A final suggestion was to provide more time for the instructors to work on their CPD activities rather than setting deadlines per semester.

5. Conclusion

This study designed and developed a language instructor PAM for use in IEPs, integrating accreditation requirements with teacher autonomy. The model was piloted over the course of one term, during which its strengths, weaknesses, and areas for revision were thoroughly assessed. The results of this study revealed insight into the nature of improvements. Accordingly, providing more guidance, delivering trainings on implementation of third category CPD activities, and opening further communication channels between model implementers and practitioners come to the fore as key revisions. The piloting process will continue over the Spring Term of the same academic year before the model is finalized. The final version is expected to make a significant contribution to the literature and provide valuable insights for IEPs. Should the model be completed as planned, it has the potential to create an added value for the IEPs as it addresses the needs of all stakeholders, takes the contextual affordances into account, keeps teacher autonomy at its core, and responds to the requirements of accreditation bodies. In addition, the model will set an example for IEPs in other international universities where accreditation of English language education is becoming more and more widespread.

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