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Teacher Evaluation as a Tool for Professional Development in Secondary Schools: Evidence from Zimbabwe

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Abstract. Teacher evaluation systems are expected to support professional development, but their developmental potential is often weakened when appraisal outcomes are not translated into learning opportunities. This study examined Zimbabwean secondary school teachers' perceptions of the Results-Based Management (RBM) appraisal system and its contribution to professional development in the Kwekwe District. A convergent parallel mixed-methods design was used, combining survey data from 292 teachers with interview data from 12 purposively selected teachers, heads of department, and school heads. This design enabled the study to combine the broad patterns in the teachers' perceptions with qualitative insights into how RBM is experienced, yielding a more detailed understanding of the connection between the appraisal system and professional development. The quantitative findings showed that the teachers recognised RBM's formal structures, particularly performance standards (58.2%), collaborative target setting (82.5%) and rating discussions (62.7%). However, they perceived the system as having limited influence on professional growth because feedback was often reduced to ratings, monitoring was weak (68.5%), mentoring was inconsistent (54.8%), collaboration time was limited (65.8%), appraisal outcomes were rarely used to plan staff development (57.9%), and there was no support for external manpower development trainings (57.5%). The qualitative findings confirmed these patterns, showing that RBM was experienced more as a compliance and documentation process than a developmental mechanism. The study concludes that RBM's limited contribution to teacher professional development stems mainly from implementation gaps rather than weakness in policy design. Drawing on goal-setting and formative evaluation theories, the findings showed that evaluation becomes developmental only when clear goals are supported by sustained feedback, monitoring, mentoring and follow-up developmental opportunities. The study contributes to teacher evaluation literature by

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framing RBM's weaknesses as a breakdown in the evaluation-development chain. It recommends strengthening the provision of actionable feedback, institutionalising mentorship, linking appraisal outcomes to individualised development plans, and improving school-level support for continuous teacher development.

Keywords: Teacher evaluation; professional development; feedback; mentorship; result-based management

1. Introduction

Teacher professional development is a central pillar of system improvement as schools navigate complex curricular reforms, intensified accountability demands, and increasingly diverse learner needs. A substantial body of research identifies teacher quality as among the most influential factors affecting student learning and academic achievement (Chetty et al., 2014; Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; Darling-Hammond, 2000; Engida et al., 2024; Hattie, 2009; Sims et al., 2021).

Emerging scholarship further suggests that improvements in teacher quality are most sustainable when professional development is continuous, practice-based, and embedded within teachers' everyday work (Avidor-Ungar, 2025). The literature collectively emphasises that enhancing teacher professionalism is most effective when professional development is ongoing, job-embedded, and supported by coherent systems throughout teachers' career trajectories rather than relying on isolated training events (The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), 2025; Mitchell et al., 2024; Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; Opfer & Pedder, 2011). Consequently, education systems continue to invest in policy mechanisms that simultaneously promote instructional improvement and ensure accountability (Heys, 2025).

Within this reform landscape, teacher evaluation has gained renewed prominence as a strategic tool, serving both accountability and professional learning functions. Rather than viewing appraisal solely as a mechanism for judgment, contemporary frameworks conceptualise it as a developmental process that; generates diagnostic feedback, supports reflective practice, and informs targeted professional learning (Shinkfield & Stufflebeam, 2012; Stronge, 2018; Wisniewski et al., 2020).

Effective evaluation systems operate through a coherent chain in which; performance expectations are clearly defined, feedback is systematically generated, and evaluation outcomes are linked to structured professional learning opportunities such as mentoring, coaching, and collaborative inquiry (OECD, 2025; Mitchell et al., 2024; Darling-Hammond et al., 2012; Timperley, 2011). Across these studies, a consistent argument emerges that evaluation is most effective when; it integrates clear performance standards, draws on multiple sources of evidence, and provides timely, credible feedback linked to professional learning opportunities (Darling-Hammond et al., 2012; Darling-Hammond et al., 2020).

However, despite its widely acknowledged potential, the formative function of teacher evaluation often remains weakly realised in practice. A growing body of research shows that appraisal systems have limited impact on improving instruction when feedback is superficial, delayed, or insufficiently contextualised (Callahan & Sadeghi, 2015; White et al., 2012; Adarkwah, 2021). Analyses from Sub-Saharan Africa similarly caution that one-size-fits-all approaches to professional development may overlook teachers' situated professional knowledge and agency, thereby reinforcing the need for school-embedded and context-responsive models (Mitchell et al., 2024). These findings suggest that professional learning is shaped by local contexts and experiences, making generic evaluation and development interventions less likely to yield meaningful improvements in teaching practice.

Donaldson (2009) and Putnam et al. (2018) also argue that teacher evaluation systems have historically struggled to move beyond compliance, rarely producing measurable improvements in teaching quality or student outcomes. Subsequent studies reinforce this concern by highlighting a persistent gap between policy intentions and implementation practices. While reforms increasingly emphasise development, implementation often prioritises scoring, documentation, and managerial oversight over learning-oriented feedback (Kraft & Gilmour, 2017; Wisniewski et al., 2020; Opfer & Pedder, 2011). Teachers often report limited influence over appraisal processes and insufficient professional support following evaluations, undermining the motivational and instructional benefits of the process. Consequently, evaluations risk becoming administrative exercises rather than catalysts for professional growth.

Large-scale international evidence, such as OECD Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS), reinforces this concern. The findings from the TALIS show that teachers are more likely to report changes in instructional practice when appraisal systems are developmental, dialogic, and explicitly linked to relevant professional learning opportunities (OECD, 2019; 2025). Conversely, when evaluation is perceived as bureaucratic, compliance-driven, or punitive, it is associated with low teacher engagement and minimal impact on practice. These findings suggest that the effectiveness of evaluation depends less on the existence of appraisal systems than on the extent to which evaluation outcomes are translated into meaningful learning opportunities. This aligns with broader research indicating that evaluation is most effective when embedded within school cultures that prioritise feedback, collaboration, and continuous improvement (Opfer & Pedder, 2011; Brouskelis, 2024).

While these challenges have been widely documented internationally, they may be particularly pronounced in contexts where resource and capacity constraints affect policy implementation. In Sub-Saharan Africa, the developmental potential of teacher evaluation is further influenced by systemic capacity constraints, policy coherence, and the fidelity of implementation at the school level. In Zimbabwe, the Results-Based Management (RBM) system has historically served as the dominant framework for performance evaluation across the public sector, including the education sector. While RBM was originally intended to strengthen

accountability, effectiveness and organisational learning, emerging evidence from recent evaluations suggests that its implementation privileges compliance, reporting and accountability functions over learning and improvement processes (World Health Organisation (WHO), 2023). Research on teacher professional learning in Zimbabwe indicates that development initiatives are frequently disjointed, inconsistently implemented, and poorly aligned with the teachers' pedagogical needs, with limited integration between evaluation outcomes and ongoing learning opportunities (Christenson & Makokoro, 2023; Singh & Mukeredzi, 2024). These concerns raise questions about whether RBM effectively supports teacher development in practice.

This study was underpinned by the goal-setting theory (Locke, 1968; Locke & Latham, 2002; 2019) and the formative evaluation theory (Scriven, 1967), which together illuminated the mechanisms through which teacher evaluation may contribute to professional development. The goal-setting theory emphasises the importance of clear performance goals, regular and timely feedback, and continuous monitoring in motivating individuals and enhancing performance. The formative evaluation theory, meanwhile, conceptualises evaluation as an ongoing and iterative process that generates feedback to support reflection, learning, and improvement. Collectively, these theories position teacher evaluation as a developmental enterprise that integrates accountability with professional learning. Together, they provided a theoretical framework for examining whether key developmental processes are embedded within Zimbabwe's RBM system.

Despite the growing body of research, there is limited empirical evidence on how secondary school teachers perceive RBM as a professional development tool in Zimbabwe. Insufficient attention has been given to whether evaluation outcomes meaningfully inform individual and school-based professional development planning, or whether RBM primarily functions as a compliance-oriented managerial tool. There has also been limited research examining the barriers that prevent appraisal outcomes from translating into meaningful professional learning. This gap is significant because it shifts attention from policy design to the school-level conditions that shape implementation, teacher learning and professional growth.

To respond to this gap, this study examined the Zimbabwean secondary school teachers' perceptions of the RBM evaluation system and its contribution to professional development. The study was guided by the following objectives: to examine the teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of the performance appraisal process as a professional development tool; to assess the relationship between evaluation processes and school-based professional development activities; and to analyse the barriers hindering the alignment of evaluation outcomes with professional development activities.

By grounding the investigation in the goal-setting and formative evaluation theories, the study contributes to teacher evaluation literature in four ways. Empirically, it provides context-specific evidence on how RBM is experienced by

secondary school teachers in Zimbabwe. Methodologically, it demonstrates the value of a convergent parallel mixed-methods design for combining survey-based patterns with qualitative explanations of teachers' lived experiences of RBM implementation. Theoretically, it examined the extent to which goal clarity, feedback monitoring, and developmental follow-up explain the perceived effectiveness of teacher evaluation. In practice, it identified the school-level conditions that need to be strengthened if RBM is to function as a developmental rather than merely as an administrative appraisal system.

2. Background to Teacher Performance Evaluation in Zimbabwe

Results-based management has emerged globally as a dominant public-sector reform framework aimed at strengthening accountability, improving efficiency, and demonstrating measurable performance outcomes (Kusek & Rist, 2004; Madhekeni, 2012; Dhakwa, 2023). In line with these international trends, the Government of Zimbabwe adopted RBM in 2005 as a comprehensive performance management and evaluation system for public sector employees, including teachers. This marked a shift toward results-oriented governance, with the expectation that enhanced performance monitoring would also support the teachers' professional development and instructional improvement.

Zimbabwe's move toward RBM was preceded by a series of post-independence administrative and performance management reforms. Following independence in 1980, the government introduced several initiatives to improve accountability, transparency, and service efficiency (Matunhu & Matunhu, 2014; Zvavahera, 2014). However, the rapid expansion of the education sector placed increasing pressure on resources and administrative capacity, thereby limiting the effectiveness of these reforms in supporting teacher development (Chivore, 1992; Zvavahera, 2013). Furthermore, the limited results, ineffective feedback, and the failure to use appraisal information to improve teaching later contributed to the abandonment of some of the initiatives (Zvavahera, 2013; Jaricha & Dzimiri, 2022; Musodza, 2019).

According to Mathwasa (2012), Zimbabwe introduced the ED94 appraisal system, also known as Annual Confidential Reports, in 1990 as part of post-independence efforts to strengthen teacher performance assessment. Under this system, the teachers' work activities were first assessed by a school-based committee, then verified at the district and provincial levels. The system was, however, exclusionary, as not all teachers were eligible for appraisal. The system was largely compensation-oriented, as appraisal outcomes were mainly used to recommend salary increments. As a result, ED94 was criticised for being administrative, judgmental, and exclusionary, with limited emphasis on feedback or teacher professional growth. Its weak developmental orientation reduced its effectiveness as a mechanism for improving teaching practice, and it was eventually dumped.

Ultimately, in 1995, to strengthen accountability, improve educational quality, and support staff development, Zimbabwe adopted the Performance Management System (PMS) (Machingambi, 2013). This was in response to the

Public Service Commission's 1987 comprehensive review of the public service (Zigora & Chigwamba, 2000). Within the education sector, PMS aimed to improve both service delivery and staff development; however, its implementation was constrained by weak feedback mechanisms, limited follow-up, and minimal linkage between the appraisal outcomes and professional learning (Zvavahera, 2013; Chiware & Vyas Doorgapersad, 2022).

These shortcomings undermined its capacity to meaningfully improve teaching practice or service delivery, ultimately contributing to its replacement. The adoption of RBM in 2005 was therefore driven by the perceived failure of earlier systems to deliver tangible improvements in public sector performance (Zvavahera, 2014). This transition was also influenced by global accountability agendas, including the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative, which emphasised measurable outcomes and efficient use of public resources (Kusek & Rist, 2004; Madhekeni, 2012). RBM was thus positioned as a response to both domestic reform needs and international pressures, with the implicit expectation that performance evaluation would improve service delivery and teaching quality.

Prior to the implementation of RBM, the Zimbabwe Public Service Regulations (2000) already required annual performance appraisals for public employees, including teachers, with the stated aim of improving service delivery. These regulations also provided for performance-based consequences, including promotions, transfers, performance awards, demotions, and disciplinary measures. RBM was thus intended to consolidate and strengthen these provisions by introducing clearer performance indicators, target-setting, and outcome-based assessment mechanisms, and by strengthening the linkage between performance evaluation and professional development. However, as emerging evidence and as this study suggests, the extent to which these intended developmental linkages have been realised in practice remains uncertain.

3. Theoretical Framework

This study drew on goal-setting and formative evaluation theories, which together offered a framework for understanding how teacher evaluation systems can either promote or hinder professional development depending on how goals, feedback, and follow-up mechanisms are structured and utilised. Together, these theories provided a complementary lens for analysing evaluation as both a motivational and a learning-oriented process, particularly in contexts where appraisal may function as either developmental or compliance-driven.

3.1 Goal-Setting Theory

The goal-setting theory was originally proposed by Locke (1968) and later expanded by Locke and Latham (1990) through extensive research in organisational and educational contexts. This theory posits that human behaviour and performance are primarily influenced by conscious goals and intentions (Locke, 1968; Locke & Latham, 2002; Ab Rahman, 2025). In essence, the theory suggests that performance improves when individuals pursue clear, specific, and challenging goals, particularly when they are committed to achieving them and

have the capacity to do so. Locke and Latham (2019) assert that goals function as cognitive guides by directing attention, mobilising effort, and sustaining persistence over time.

A central assumption of the goal-setting theory is that specific goals enhance performance more effectively than vague or general intentions, such as simply encouraging individuals to “do their best” (Locke & Latham, 2002). Thus, specific goals provide a reference point for monitoring progress, while appropriately challenging goals stimulate greater effort and persistence. Another key assumption is that feedback is essential, enabling individuals to evaluate progress toward goal attainment and adjust strategies accordingly. Without feedback, the regulatory and motivational functions of goals are significantly weakened, emphasising the importance of continuous monitoring in evaluation systems.

Studies further emphasise that the effectiveness of goals depends on contextual factors such as task complexity, individual capabilities, and the presence of supportive organisational structures (Locke & Latham, 2002; Martins van Jaarsveld et al., 2025). In complex professional environments such as teaching, where outcomes are multifaceted and not always immediately observable, poorly defined or weakly monitored goals may fail to promote improvement. From this perspective, teacher evaluation systems are more likely to support professional development when they establish meaningful instructional goals, integrate ongoing feedback, and connect evaluation outcomes to concrete developmental opportunities such as mentoring, collaboration, and structured professional learning.

3.2 Formative Evaluation Theory

The formative evaluation theory is primarily attributed to Michael Scriven, who introduced the distinction between formative and summative evaluation in seminal work on curriculum evaluation (Scriven, 1967). The researcher conceptualised formative evaluation as an ongoing process conducted during programme implementation, with the purpose of improving effectiveness, in contrast to summative evaluation, which focuses on judging overall outcomes.

A foundational assumption of the formative evaluation theory is that evaluation should serve a developmental and learning-oriented function rather than merely a judgmental or compliance function (Scriven, 1967). Evaluation becomes formative only when the information generated is actively used to inform improvement, including modifying practices, addressing weaknesses, and reinforcing effective strategies. This implies the existence of feedback loops in which evidence is collected, interpreted, and acted upon in a timely manner, as well as mechanisms that support the translation of feedback into professional learning.

In educational contexts, formative evaluation has been further developed through research on formative assessment, particularly by Black and Wiliam (1998; 2009), and it has continued to evolve with innovations in educational assessment and evaluation. These scholars argue that effective formative processes depend on

systematic feedback that enables practitioners to reflect on and adjust their practices. They emphasise that feedback must be actionable, contextually relevant, and embedded within supportive professional environments to drive improvement. Formative approaches, therefore, assume the presence of monitoring mechanisms, professional dialogue, and institutional support structures that enable evaluation findings to translate into learning and development, conditions that are often weak or absent in compliance-oriented systems.

Applied to teacher evaluation, this theory conceptualises appraisal as a continuous learning process rather than as a discrete administrative event. When evaluation is implemented as a bureaucratic exercise characterised by limited feedback, weak follow-up, and minimal developmental consequences, its formative potential is significantly diminished, leading to practices that prioritise compliance over professional growth.

3.3 Relevance of the Theories to the Study

The goal-setting theory and the formative evaluation theory complement each other, providing a coherent framework for analysing teacher evaluation systems. The goal-setting theory emphasises the motivational role of clear performance expectations and feedback, while the formative evaluation theory highlights the processes through which evaluation information is used to support learning and improvement. Together, these theories suggest that effective evaluation depends not only on establishing clear goals but also on the presence of feedback, monitoring, and follow-up mechanisms that enable those goals to translate into professional learning.

These theories were particularly relevant to this study. In relation to the objectives, goal-setting theory informed the examination of teachers' perceptions of the RBM appraisal process, focusing on performance targets, feedback, monitoring, and goal clarity. The formative evaluation theory guided the analysis of the connection between the evaluation processes and the school-based professional development activities, emphasising how appraisal evidence is utilised to support reflection, mentoring and professional learning. Both theories also informed the analysis of barriers to aligning evaluation outcomes with professional development, highlighting feedback loops, follow-up support, and the translation of appraisal findings into actionable development strategies.

4. Methodology

This study employed a convergent parallel mixed methods design within a pragmatist research paradigm. This design enabled the concurrent collection and separate analysis of quantitative and qualitative data, followed by the integration of the two data sets to identify areas of convergence, divergence and complementarity in the teachers' perceptions of the RBM evaluation system and its contribution to professional development. The pragmatist approach was particularly appropriate because it accommodated the study's dual focus on examining the measurable patterns in the teachers' responses while also generating contextual qualitative insights into evaluation practices and outcomes.

This philosophical stance allowed for a better understanding of the perceived developmental value of the RBM evaluation system and the implementation challenges that limit its effectiveness. Methodologically, the study was informed by the goal-setting and formative evaluation theories, which provided the conceptual framework for aligning the research design, instrument development, and interpretation of findings with the study's objectives.

4.1 Study Context, Participants and Sampling

The research was conducted in the Kwekwe District, of Zimbabwe, and it focused on the government secondary schools that implemented RBM. The district provided relevant context for examining how RBM operated in practice, as public schools were expected to use teacher performance data as part of public-sector accountability and professional development processes. The target population comprised of 985 secondary teachers from 55 government secondary schools in the district. Focusing on one district enabled a context-sensitive examination of the teachers' perceptions of RBM and the extent to which appraisal outcomes were translated into professional development opportunities.

The sampling process was aligned with the study's mixed-methods design. For the quantitative strand, a stratified sampling approach was used to ensure representation of both urban and rural school contexts. Of the 55 government secondary schools in the district, 10 were selected, comprising of five urban and five rural schools. Based on a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error, the minimum required sample size was calculated as 278 teachers (Cohen et al., 2011). To account for possible non-response, 300 teachers were randomly selected from the participating schools to complete the questionnaire. Of these, 292 teachers completed and returned the questionnaires, thus yielding a response rate of 97.3%. This response rate strengthened the credibility of the quantitative findings and provided a broad view of the teachers' perceptions across the selected school contexts.

For the qualitative strand, purposive sampling was used to select the participants with direct experience implementing RBM and who could provide detailed insights into teacher appraisal and professional development practices. A total of 12 participants were selected from four of the schools that had participated in the quantitative strand, comprising of two urban and two rural schools. The qualitative participants included four teachers, four heads of department, and four school heads. Selecting the participants from the schools already included in the survey helped to strengthen the integration between the study's quantitative and qualitative strands.

Having clear inclusion criteria ensured that the participants had rich and relevant knowledge of RBM implementation. The schools had to be government secondary schools that were operational by 2005, which is the year RBM was introduced. The school heads and heads of department were required to hold substantive appointments and have direct experience with RBM implementation, while the participating teachers were required to have experience with the appraisal system. These criteria ensured that the participants provided informed

perspectives on how RBM appraisal processes were implemented and how they related to professional development. The qualitative sample size of 12 participants was considered appropriate because the interviews yielded sufficient depth and recurring patterns that were relevant to the study objectives. Additionally, methodological literature suggests that data saturation is frequently achieved by the 12th interview (Guest et al., 2006; Daher, 2023; Sebele-Mpofu, 2020).

4.2 Data Collection Procedures

Quantitative data were collected using a researcher-developed questionnaire consisting of closed-ended items measured on a five-point Likert scale. The questionnaire was designed to examine the teachers' perceptions of the RBM evaluation system as a tool for professional development. The questionnaire items were aligned with the main constructs of the goal-setting and formative evaluation theories, including goal clarity, performance feedback, monitoring, and developmental follow-up. This alignment enabled a systematic evaluation of the extent to which RBM evaluation practices reflected principles of professional learning, formative support and continuous improvement.

Qualitative data were gathered through semi-structured face-to-face interviews, enabling participants to provide detailed accounts of their experiences with RBM evaluation practices, feedback processes, and developmental support. Like the questionnaire, the interview schedule was informed by the adopted theories, and it included questions addressing similar constructs. The interviews lasted about 30 to 45 minutes, depending on the probing questions and the flow of the conversation. With the participants' consent, the interviews were audio-recorded to ensure accurate capture and transcription of the responses.

4.3 Instrument Validity, Reliability and Trustworthiness

Both instruments underwent pilot testing to evaluate clarity, relevance, and length. The questionnaire was subjected to expert review to establish face and content validity. Test-retest reliability and internal consistency, as measured by Cronbach's alpha, were both greater than .70, thus indicating satisfactory reliability (Pietersen & Maree, 2016). To strengthen the trustworthiness of the qualitative data, data triangulation, reflexive journaling, and member checking were employed.

The reflexive journal was used to document methodological decisions, emerging reflections, and potential researcher biases throughout the research process. This process enabled the researcher to remain self-conscious about personal assumptions and to reflect critically on the decisions made to minimise bias during data collection and interpretation. Member checking was conducted through transcript verification. After the interviews were transcribed, the transcripts were shared with the interviewees to confirm the accuracy of the responses and ensure that views were represented appropriately. These procedures enhanced the trustworthiness of the qualitative findings.

4.4 Data Analysis

Quantitative data was analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics (percentages) were used to summarise

response patterns and to identify the trends in the teachers' perceptions of the RBM evaluation system's effectiveness in promoting professional development. The approach was appropriate because the quantitative strand sought to establish the distribution of the teachers' views.

Qualitative data was transcribed verbatim and analysed thematically using ATLAS.ti, as guided by Braun and Clarke's (2006) phases of thematic analysis. The process began with familiarisation, during which the researcher read and re-read the transcripts to gain an overall understanding of the participants' accounts. A combined deductive-inductive analytic approach was used, and initial codes were generated deductively. The deductive coding framework was informed by the core constructs of the goal-setting and formative evaluation theories, including goal clarity, performance feedback, monitoring, professional learning and developmental follow-up.

These theory-driven codes provided an initial analytical framework for organising the qualitative data. The codes were then refined through inductive coding to incorporate context-specific insights from participants' accounts of the RBM evaluation system. Codes were then grouped into candidate themes, reviewed against the coded extracts and the full data sets, and defined in relation to the objectives of the study. This process ensured that the themes were generated systematically while remaining grounded in the theoretical framework and the participants' accounts.

The integration of the two data sets occurred at the interpretation stage through a side-by-side comparison and joint display analysis. This process enabled the identification of areas of convergence, complementarity, and divergence across the two datasets. The integration of statistical patterns with the participants' narrative accounts provided a more comprehensive understanding of teachers' perceptions and experiences of the RBM evaluation system as a form of professional development.

Convergence was assessed by comparing the direction and meaning of the quantitative response patterns with the qualitative themes for each objective. Findings were considered convergent when both the survey trends and interview accounts supported the same interpretation. They were deemed complementary when the qualitative data expanded upon or clarified quantitative results, and divergent when the two data sets indicated different or conflicting interpretations. The comparisons were then synthesised into narratives and meta-inferences for each objective.

4.5 Ethical considerations

Ethical approval was obtained before data collection, and permission to conduct the study was obtained from the relevant education authorities. Participants were briefed on the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation and their right to withdraw at any time without penalty. Written informed consent was acquired before data collection. Neutral pseudonyms were used and identifying details were removed from the transcripts and reports to preserve anonymity,

with informed consent, anonymity, and confidentiality strictly maintained. Data was stored securely and was only accessible for research purposes to maintain confidentiality.

5. Results and Findings

This section presents the integrated quantitative and qualitative findings in line with the three research objectives. In line with the convergent mixed-methods design, each objective is presented through a joint display, followed by a concise, integrated narrative and a meta-inference. The purpose is to show areas of convergence, complementarity or divergence between the survey results and interview findings.

5.1 Objective 1: To examine the teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of the performance appraisal process as a professional development tool

Table 1: Joint display of results and findings on the effectiveness of the appraisal process

Quantitative Results	Qualitative Findings	Integration	Meta-Inference
81.3% of the respondents agreed that they knew what constitutes good teaching. In addition, 57.8% agreed that the appraisal is based on clear job descriptions, while 58.2% agreed that RBM is based on clear performance standards.	The participants in the study demonstrated a clear understanding of the expectations and explained that appraisal targets were established jointly by the appraiser and appraisee to guide professional work. One participant explained, <i>"At the beginning of each year, we set targets with my supervisor"</i> (Participant C).	Convergence	Targets generally understand the performance expectations embedded in the RBM appraisal system.
82.5% of the respondents agreed that performance targets are jointly set by the appraisers and appraisees.	Participants consistently described the target-setting process as collaborative and useful in guiding their work.	Convergence	Collaborative target setting emerged as one of the strongest features of the appraisal process.
63% of the respondents disagreed that the appraisal guidelines are clear.	Participants indicated that appraisal procedures were implemented inconsistently, and some teachers remain unclear about how the process should be conducted.	Complementarity	Although performance expectations were relatively clear, uncertainty remains regarding appraisal procedures and implementation.

62.7% of the respondents agreed that they provided input during the final rating discussions.	Participants acknowledged that they were sometimes given opportunities to comment during appraisal discussions.	Convergence	Teachers participated in appraisal discussions, although the influence of this participation appeared limited.
67.5% of the respondents disagreed that appraisal feedback improves teaching, while 57.9% disagreed that appraisal outcomes inform staff development programmes.	Participants described feedback as mainly limited to performance ratings with little guidance on how to improve. One participant stated, <i>"You are just told that you got a 3 or a 4 without explanations on the weak areas and how to improve"</i> (Participant D)	Convergence	Feedback was perceived as evaluative rather than developmental.
67.7% of the respondents agreed that the instrument covered all aspects of teaching, yet 57.3% disagreed that the appraisal process effectively evaluates teacher performance.	Participants described the appraisal tool as comprehensive but questioned its practical value. One participant explained, <i>"The tool is comprehensive, but nothing follows after the ratings"</i> (Participant F).	Complementarity	The appraisal instrument was perceived as comprehensive, but its usefulness was undermined by limited developmental follow-up.

Integrated Findings for Objective 1

The findings showed that the teachers generally perceived the RBM appraisal system as effective at clarifying performance expectations but less effective at supporting professional growth. The quantitative results indicated that most respondents understood what constitutes good teaching (81.3%), recognised the existence of performance standards (58.2%), and agreed that performance targets were jointly set (82.5%). These findings were supported by the interview participants, who described target setting as a collaborative process that provided direction for their work. For example, one participant stated, *"At the beginning of each year, we set targets which guide the evaluation process together with my supervisors"* (Participant C).

However, the findings also revealed weaknesses in the implementation of the appraisal process. Although the teachers understood the expected standards, 63% disagreed that the appraisal guidelines were clear. The interview participants similarly reported confusion and inconsistency in the implementation of RBM. One participant explained, *"There is a need for more education on the RBM, more training on the system and how to use the guidelines so that we are clear"* (Participant A). This suggests that clarity exists mainly at the level of performance expectations, while appraisal procedures and implementation remain less clear.

The findings further showed that appraisal feedback has limited developmental value. Although 62.7% of the respondents reported providing input during the final rating discussions, 67.5% disagreed that feedback improves their teaching. Qualitative evidence explains this pattern, as the participants reported that feedback is often reduced to performance scores rather than guidance for improvement. For instance, one participant stated, *"You are just told you got a 3 or a 4, no one explains what exactly must change or what needs to be done after the ratings"* (Participant D). In support, another added, *"Even if I get a 5 or a 1, nothing changes. We have never received feedback on how to address the shortcomings identified during the evaluation"* (Participant G). The participants repeatedly emphasised that the appraisal outcomes seldom result in professional support, learning opportunities or instructional improvement. Overall, the findings indicated that the RBM appraisal process is stronger in setting expectations than in supporting teacher development. The teachers participate in target setting and rating discussions, but these processes are not consistently followed by meaningful feedback, support, or professional learning opportunities.

Meta-Inference for Objective 1

The integrated findings suggested that the RBM appraisal system is procedurally established but developmentally limited. While the teachers understood performance expectations and participated in target setting, the poor quality of feedback and limited follow-up reduced the system's contribution to professional development.

5.2 Objective 2: To assess the relationship between evaluation processes and school-based professional development activities

Table 2: Joint display on the relationship between evaluation processes and development activities

Quantitative Results	Qualitative Findings	Integration	Meta-Inference
57.9% of the respondents disagreed that appraisal outcomes inform staff development programmes.	Participants reported that staff development activities were planned independently of the appraisal findings. One participant posited, <i>"Staff development topics are decided separately by the Head of Departments and the school head. They do not stem from appraisal results"</i> (Participant B).	Convergence	Appraisal outcomes were weakly linked to school-based professional development planning.
54.8% of the respondents disagreed that underperforming teachers received mentoring after appraisal.	Participants indicated that mentoring was not structured or consistently implemented.	Convergence	Mentoring was not used systematically in response to appraisal findings.
57.5% of the respondents disagreed that they received manpower development support for external training following appraisal.	Participants reported that developmental needs identified through appraisal rarely result in access to specialised training opportunities.	Convergence	Training support was insufficiently connected to identified appraisal needs.

65.8% of respondents disagreed that they are provided with time for collaboration.	Participants described appraisal as an isolated event with limited opportunities for professional dialogue or collaborative learning.	Convergence	Collaborative learning opportunities remained limited after appraisal.
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Integrated Findings for Objective 2

The findings revealed a weak relationship between appraisal outcomes and school-based professional development activities. The quantitative results showed that most respondents did not perceive appraisal findings as informing staff development programmes (57.9%), mentoring, manpower development, or collaboration. This pattern was confirmed by the interview participants, who explained that professional development activities were often planned separately from the appraisal results. As one participant stated, *“Staff development topics are decided separately by the Head of Departments and the school head. They do not stem from appraisal results”* (Participant B).

Mentoring also emerged as a weak area. More than half of the respondents (54.8%) disagreed that poorly performing teachers received mentoring from experienced colleagues. The interview participants acknowledged the value of mentoring but indicated that it is not systematically implemented. One participant explained, *“If mentoring were implemented seriously, some teachers would improve, but then, it is not structured”* (Participant J).

The findings also showed that the teachers had limited opportunities for collaboration after appraisal. A majority of respondents (65.8%) disagreed that they were given adequate time to collaborate with colleagues, while interviewees described appraisals as rarely including structured professional dialogue, peer learning, or collaborative reflection.

Taken together, the findings suggested that appraisal and professional development operated largely as separate processes. Although appraisal generates information about teacher performance, this information is not consistently used to plan staff development, mentoring, collaboration, or training.

Meta-Inference for Objective 2

The integrated findings indicated that the appraisal outcomes are weakly connected to professional development activities. As a result, RBM functions more as a performance documentation process than as a coordinated mechanism for supporting teacher learning and growth.

5.3 Objective 3: To analyse the barriers hindering the alignment of evaluation outcomes with professional development activities

Table 3: Joint display of findings on the barriers hindering the alignment of evaluation outcomes and development activities

Quantitative Results	Qualitative Findings	Integration	Meta-inference
68.5% of the respondents disagreed that continuous monitoring occurs during the appraisal cycle. 67.1% disagreed that appraisal discussions focus on progress made towards targets.	Participants reported that follow-up after target setting was largely absent. One participant asserted, <i>"After targets are set, no one follows up"</i> (Participant F).	Convergence	Monitoring and follow-up mechanisms were implemented weakly.
67.5% of the respondents disagreed that appraisal feedback improves instructional practice.	Participants stated that feedback consists mainly of ratings without developmental guidance.	Convergence	Feedback was not consistently translated into guidance for improvement.
63.7% of the respondents disagreed that the appraisers have adequate time to conduct appraisal activities, while 49.7% disagreed that sufficient resources were available to support the appraisal processes.	Participants highlighted workload pressures, competing priorities, and resource shortages. One participant explained, <i>"The workload is too high to allow time for reflection or even for collaboration"</i> (Participant C).	Convergence	Time and resource constraints undermined the developmental implementation of appraisal.
69.5% of the respondents agreed that the appraisers were knowledgeable about teacher appraisal.	Participants generally regarded evaluators as competent professionals	Convergence	The main barriers appeared to be organisational rather than related to evaluator competence.

Integrated Findings for Objective 3

The findings showed that weak monitoring and follow-up were major barriers to aligning appraisal outcomes with professional development. Most respondents (68.5%) disagreed that continuous monitoring occurred during the appraisal cycle or that appraisal discussions focus on progress toward targets (67.1%). Interview participants confirmed this finding, explaining that follow-up after target setting was often absent. One participant stated, *"After targets are set, no one follows up"* (Participant F).

Feedback also emerged as a key barrier. The quantitative results showed that most respondents (67.5%) did not believe that appraisal feedback improved instructional practice. The qualitative findings explained that feedback was often

limited to ratings rather than detailed guidance for improvement. This indicated that appraisal information was generated but not consistently used to support professional learning.

The findings further indicated that the organisational conditions affect the implementation of appraisal. Although most respondents (69.5%) agreed that appraisers were knowledgeable, many (63.7%) reported that the appraisers lacked sufficient time and resources to conduct appraisals effectively. The interview participants attributed this to workload pressures, competing administrative demands, and limited resources. Therefore, the main challenge appeared to be less about evaluator competence and more about the conditions needed to support developmental appraisal.

The barriers highlighted in objective 3 indicated that the weak connection between appraisal outcomes and professional development persisted due to the absence of a formal mechanism at the school level to translate appraisal findings into actionable development strategies. The participants noted that the evidence from the appraisal process was not utilised consistently to create individualised development plans, arrange mentoring or to prioritise staff development activities, hence, the identified developmental needs of the teachers often remained inadequately addressed.

Meta-Inference for Objective 3

The integrated findings indicated that the barriers limiting the developmental value of RBM are interconnected. Weak monitoring, limited feedback, inadequate mentoring, insufficient collaboration, resource constraints, and the absence of formal mechanisms to translate appraisal findings into professional development plans prevented the use of appraisal outcomes for developmental purposes. Consequently, even though the appraisal process was implemented, its developmental function remained limited.

5.4 Overall Integrated Meta-Inference

Across the three objectives, the findings showed that the RBM appraisal system had clear formal structures, including performance standards, target setting, and rating discussions. However, these structures were not consistently supported by developmental processes such as feedback, monitoring, mentoring, collaboration, and targeted professional development. The overall finding was that RBM is perceived as an accountability and performance documentation system than as a professional development mechanism. This conclusion is supported by the convergence between the quantitative and qualitative findings across all three objectives.

6. Discussion

The study examined the secondary teachers' perceptions of the RBM evaluation system and its contribution to professional development in Zimbabwe. Overall, the study's findings indicated that the RBM appraisal system is relatively strong at establishing performance expectations, promoting collaborative target-setting, and providing a formal structure for evaluating teachers. However, the

contribution of RBM to professional growth is perceived as limited because feedback, monitoring, mentoring, collaboration, and follow-up on professional development are poorly implemented. The quantitative and qualitative findings converged strongly across the three objectives, suggesting that the main challenge lies not in the absence of appraisal structures, but in the limited translation of appraisal outcomes into sustained professional learning. This finding is consistent with prior scholarship arguing that teacher evaluation meaningfully contributes to instructional improvement only when supported by timely feedback, professional dialogue, mentoring, and development-oriented follow-up (OECD, 2025; Mitchell et al., 2024; Darling-Hammond et al., 2012; Timperley, 2011).

Another key finding is that the teachers generally understand the performance expectations entrenched in the RBM system. Most of the respondents indicated that they knew and understood what constitutes good teaching, that appraisal is based on job descriptions and performance standards, and that targets were jointly set by appraisers and appraisees. The qualitative findings confirmed this, as participants described target setting as a collaborative process that provides direction for professional work. This finding aligns with the goal-setting theory, which asserts that clear, specific and agreed-upon goals can direct attention, mobilise effort and support performance improvement when individuals are committed to achieving them (Locke, 1968; Locke & Latham, 2002, 2019). In this respect, the RBM appraisal process provides a crucial developmental foundation, as it enables teachers to operate with performance expectations and be target-oriented, which is motivational and fosters a reflective culture.

On the other hand, the findings also highlighted that clear goals alone are insufficient to promote professional development. Even though the performance expectations were generally well understood by the teachers, many also reported that the appraisal guidelines were unclear and that implementation was inconsistent. This distinction is important because it highlights that while RBM is well-designed, it is not as effective in implementation at the school level. From the perspective of the goal-setting theory, goals are effective only when accompanied by feedback, monitoring, and supportive conditions that help individuals assess progress and adjust their practice (Locke & Latham, 2002).

Therefore, the developmental weakness of RBM does not appear to stem from unclear performance expectations but rather from the absence of a coherent implementation process that sustains the teachers' engagement with those goals throughout the appraisal cycle. This aligns with previous research showing that teacher evaluation systems often fail to improve practice when implementation prioritises compliance, documentation, and scoring over professional learning (Wisniewski et al., 2020; Kraft & Gilmour, 2017; Opfer & Pedder, 2011).

Another key finding concerned the limited developmental value of the appraisal feedback. Even though the teachers reported having some opportunity to participate in final rating discussions, most argued that the feedback did not improve their teaching. The interviewees explained that feedback was often reduced to simply communicating ratings, with little to no explanation of

strengths, weaknesses, or strategies for improvement. This finding is consistent with the studies showing that appraisal feedback has limited developmental value when it is vague, delayed, superficial, or disconnected from the teachers' classroom realities (Adarkwah, 2021; Callahan & Sadeghi, 2015; White et al., 2012). It also resonates with Wisniewski et al. (2020), who emphasise that feedback is developmental and contributes to learning only when it is meaningful, credible, and actionable.

Theoretically, the finding on feedback reinforces the relevance of the formative evaluation theory. Scriven's (1967) distinction between formative and summative evaluation suggests that evaluation becomes developmental only when evidence is used to improve practice. Similarly, Black and William (1998, 2009) stress that formative processes depend on the feedback that enables practitioners to reflect, adjust and improve. However, this study revealed that in the current case, feedback appears to serve more as an evaluative record than as a formative tool.

Ultimately, this suggests that while RBM produced performance information, it was not consistently converted into professional learning. The implication for policy and practice is that feedback standards need to be strengthened within the RBM process. Appraisers must receive clear guidance and training on delivering evidence-based, specific, and actionable feedback. This feedback should identify professional development needs and connect them to appropriate support. Although this conclusion is based on the teachers' perceptions rather than direct observation of appraisal meetings, the convergence between the survey and interview data strengthens the credibility of the findings.

Moreover, the study also revealed that the appraisal outcomes are weakly linked to school-based professional development planning. The quantitative results indicated that most teachers disagreed that the appraisal findings inform staff development programmes, mentoring, manpower development or collaborative learning. The qualitative findings confirmed that the staff development topics are often determined independently of the appraisal results. This suggests that evaluation and professional processes operate independently rather than as interconnected components of a coherent teacher development system. The finding aligns with Darling-Hammond et al. (2020), Mitchell et al. (2024), OECD (2025), as well as Timperley (2011), who argue that professional development is most effective when it is continuous, job-embedded, and informed by evidence of teachers' development needs.

This finding has implications for teacher evaluation policies. If appraisal outcomes are disconnected and not used to inform professional development activities and programmes, then the system cannot fulfil its formative function. The schools should therefore institutionalise the mechanisms through which the appraisal results inform individualised professional development plans, departmental staff development priorities, mentoring programmes, and school-wide improvement strategies. Such alignment would help to transform appraisal from a procedural requirement into a practical tool for professional development. This implication is particularly important in resource-constrained contexts, where

professional development opportunities may be limited and must therefore be carefully targeted to identified needs. However, because the study did not directly measure changes in teaching practice or participation in professional development activities, the findings should be interpreted as evidence of perceived developmental disconnection rather than direct proof of instructional impact. Future studies could extend these findings through classroom observations, document analysis, and longitudinal tracking of teachers' professional growth after appraisal.

The findings also revealed that mentoring and collaboration are not systematically used as developmental responses to appraisal outcomes. More than half of the respondents disagreed that underperforming teachers received mentoring, and many indicated that they were not given sufficient time to collaborate with colleagues. Similarly, the interviewees described an appraisal as an isolated event that rarely leads to professional dialogue, peer reflection or follow-up support. This weakens the developmental potential of RBM as teacher development is not only an individual process but also a social and collaborative one. The literature on effective professional development emphasises that teachers improve their practice when they engage in sustained professional enquiry, coaching, mentoring, and collaborative reflection within supportive school cultures (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; Mitchell et al., 2024; OECD, 2019, 2025).

The implication is that the school leaders and policymakers should treat mentoring and collaboration as central components of the appraisal cycle rather than as optional activities. Formal mentoring structures could support the teachers who require improvement, while other strategies, including departmental meetings and professional learning communities, could create spaces for teachers to interpret feedback, share approaches, and monitor progress towards targets. This would also strengthen the formative function of RBM by ensuring that appraisal findings lead to developmental action. While the study's focus on one district limited the extent to which the findings can be generalised to all Zimbabwean schools, the consistency of the quantitative and qualitative evidence suggests that the identified issues were significant within the studied context and may offer useful insights for similar resource-constrained education systems.

Another key finding was that organisational and resource limitations undermine the developmental function of RBM. Even though the respondents generally perceived appraisers as knowledgeable about teacher appraisal, they also reported inadequate time, limited resources, heavy workloads and weak monitoring as challenges to the effective implementation of RBM as a development tool. This finding suggests that the problem is not evaluator competence but rather the institutional conditions under which the evaluation is implemented. This finding is significant because it changes the understanding of the limited developmental value of RBM. Rather than attributing this limitation to individual appraiser's weaknesses, it highlights the systemic constraints. Additionally, the finding supports previous studies conducted in Zimbabwe and the surrounding region, which indicate that professional development initiatives

often suffer from poor coordination, inadequate resources, and weak alignment between policy intentions and school-level practices (Christenson & Makokoro, 2023; Singh & Mukeredzi, 2024).

From a theoretical perspective, this finding extends goal-setting and formative evaluation theories by showing that clear goals and evaluative information cannot produce professional learning unless institutional conditions support feedback, monitoring, reflection, and follow-up. Thus, in resource-constrained contexts, the evaluation-development chain may break down not because teachers reject appraisal, but because schools lack the time, structures and resources needed to convert appraisal results into meaningful learning. This study thus contributes to the teacher evaluation literature by demonstrating that the system's failure as a developmental tool should be understood as a breakdown in the evaluation-development chain rather than as a weakness of appraisal design alone. This insight is particularly relevant for systems that adopt performance management reforms without adequately resourcing the professional development mechanisms required to make them effective.

The study also highlights the need to balance accountability and development in teacher evaluation systems. While RBM was introduced within the broader public sector reform agenda aimed at strengthening accountability, efficiency, and measurable performance outcomes (Kusek & Rist, 2004; Madhekeni, 2012), the findings suggest that when accountability mechanisms are not accompanied by developmental support, the teachers may experience appraisal as a compliance rather than as a professional learning process. This resonates with international evidence showing that the teachers are more likely to improve practice when appraisal is developmental, dialogic, and linked to relevant professional learning opportunities (OECD, 2019; 2025). Policy reform should therefore maintain accountability while integrating it into a more robust framework that fosters teacher development. This entails conducting regular review meetings, creating documented development plans, establishing mentoring arrangements, and implementing feedback procedures that are monitored for quality rather than just for completion.

Despite its limitations, the study provides valid and useful evidence on the teachers' experiences of RBM. The study's reliance on self-reported data means that the findings may reflect the participants' interpretations, memories, and workplace experiences rather than objectively observed appraisal practices. However, the use of a convergent mixed-methods design strengthens the trustworthiness of the conclusions because similar patterns emerged across both the survey and interview data. The high response rate, triangulation of data sources, member checking, and the inclusion of teachers, heads of department, and school leaders further enhance the credibility of the findings. Hence, while the results should not be interpreted as definitive evidence of RBM's actual effect on classroom instruction, they offer strong evidence of how the system was experienced by those directly involved in its implementation.

Overall, the study shows that RBM had the structural potential to support teacher professional development, particularly through clear performance expectations and collaborative target -setting. However, this potential remained unrealised because the appraisal outcomes were not systematically connected to formative feedback, mentoring, collaboration, monitoring, and professional development planning. The findings, therefore, reinforce the central argument of this study: teacher evaluation systems derive their developmental value not merely from setting goals or rating performance, but from the extent to which feedback and follow-up processes are integrated and sustained. Therefore, for RBM to have functioned as a meaningful professional development mechanism, policy and practice must move beyond compliance-oriented appraisals and strengthen the institutional processes that translate evaluation findings into continuous teacher learning and instructional improvement.

7. Conclusion

This study examined secondary school teachers' perceptions of the RBM evaluation system and its role in supporting professional development in Zimbabwe's Kwekwe District. The findings indicated that RBM contains important structural features associated with effective appraisal, including comprehensive evaluation criteria, knowledgeable appraisers, collaboratively set performance targets and opportunities for ratings. However, these structures do not consistently translate into meaningful professional growth. The teachers perceived appraisal feedback as largely insufficient, often limited to ratings rather than specific guidance for improving instructional practice. They also reported weak monitoring, limited mentoring, inadequate time for collaboration, and poor linkage between appraisal outcomes and school-based staff development programmes or support for external manpower development training.

Therefore, the limited developmental contribution of RBM stems less from a weakness in the policy framework itself than from the gaps in implementation at the school level. The findings reinforce the goal-setting theory by showing that clear targets are useful but insufficient unless they are supported by sustained feedback, monitoring and follow-up. They also affirm the formative evaluation theory, which emphasises that evaluation becomes developmental only when evidence is used to guide reflection, mentoring, and targeted professional learning. In this study, RBM generated performance information, but this information was not consistently converted into developmental action.

The studies contribute to teacher evaluation literature by conceptualising the problem as a breakdown in the evaluation-development chain rather than as a failure of appraisal design alone. It also highlights the need to balance accountability and development, especially in resource-constrained education contexts where appraisal can easily become a compliance exercise. To strengthen RBM's developmental value, the schools should improve the quality of feedback, institutionalise mentoring, create time for professional collaboration and ensure that appraisal findings inform individualised development plans and school-wide professional learning priorities. Teacher evaluation can support instructional

improvement only when it is embedded in a sustained culture of feedback, support and continuous learning.

8. Implications for Future Research

The findings of this study point to several areas for further investigation to deepen the understanding of teacher evaluation systems and their contribution to professional development. Future studies could examine how appraisal processes are implemented in practice through observational research, including classroom observations and analysis of appraisal documentation. Such approaches could provide richer insights into how feedback, professional dialogue, monitoring and follow-up are enacted during evaluation cycles.

Research could also investigate the relationship between teacher evaluation and measurable professional development outcomes, including participation in mentoring, engagement in collaborative learning, changes in instructional practices and improvements in teachers' reflective capacity. This could help to clarify whether, how and under what conditions an appraisal contributes to instructional improvement.

There is a need to explore and test alternative developmental models of teacher appraisal. Intervention-based studies could assess whether strengthening evaluator training, introducing structured feedback protocols, or explicitly linking appraisal outcomes to mentoring, staff development, and collaborative learning improves the effectiveness of evaluation systems as tools for professional development. Future research could therefore move beyond descriptive accounts of teacher evaluation systems and focus more directly on the conditions under which appraisal produces measurable improvements in teaching practice and professional learning.

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Conflict of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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