

From appraisal to professional learning: How organisational and relational conditions shape teacher performance appraisal in Ghana

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ABSTRACT

Teacher performance appraisal supports both accountability and professional development, yet its developmental value depends on how schools implement formal procedures. This study examined how selected public basic schools in the Bibiani-Anhwiaso-Bekwai Municipality of Ghana implement and experience teacher performance appraisal, focusing on the conditions shaping its developmental use. The study used an interpretivist qualitative case study design involving five public basic schools, informed by Goal-Setting Theory and Self-Determination Theory. Data were generated through semi-structured individual interviews and two focus group discussions involving 25 participants and analysed thematically using NVivo. Five interrelated themes emerged: formal standardisation and variable enactment; feedback usability and instructional adjustment; teacher agency and participation; relational legitimacy, trust and fairness; and organisational capacity and support. The findings indicate that appraisal was perceived to support professional development when feedback was prompt, targeted and actionable, teachers had meaningful opportunities to participate, relationships were characterised by trust and procedural fairness, and organisational support was available. When these conditions were weak or absent, teachers experienced appraisal as episodic and compliance-focused. The study proposes a supported motivational-developmental process that offers a qualitative account of how appraisal may progress from formal expectations and observation through feedback, reflection, goal setting, supported action and further review, while organisational and relational constraints may interrupt this process. The study suggests strengthening implementation guidance, appraiser preparation, connections between appraisal and professional development, teacher participation, and organisational support for appraisal-related development.

Keywords: Teacher Evaluation, Educational Leadership, Instructional Improvement, Teacher Performance Appraisal, Professional Learning

I. INTRODUCTION

Teacher performance appraisal occupies a contested position in education because it is expected to serve both accountability and professional development purposes. When appraisal produces credible evidence, useful feedback and appropriate opportunities for professional support, it can contribute to professional learning and improvement. However, the existence of a formal evaluation system does not guarantee such outcomes. The usefulness of feedback, school leadership, organisational conditions and the purposes attached to evaluation influence whether appraisal becomes developmental or remains primarily administrative (Delvaux et al., 2013; Tuytens & Devos, 2011). Evidence from the United States similarly suggests that teacher evaluation can contribute to improved teaching under particular conditions, while highlighting the difficulty of producing high-quality feedback through formal evaluation systems (Kraft & Christian, 2022; Taylor & Tyler, 2012).

This tension is especially relevant in African education systems, where appraisal is increasingly linked to professional standards, teacher development, and educational accountability. Its implementation, however, may be affected by resource limitations, evaluator capacity, hierarchical relationships, competing administrative demands, and perceptions of fairness and trust. In South Africa, for example, developmental appraisal has been associated with questions of justice, power, and educators' experiences of organisational processes (Perumalsamy et al., 2024). In Kenya, concerns have been raised about the extent to which appraisal information is used to identify and address teachers' professional-development needs (Kariuki & Guantai, 2020). Similarly, research in Angola has highlighted evaluator competence, perceived fairness, and the contribution of appraisal to professional development as important implementation issues (Abelha et al., 2020). These studies indicate that the developmental value of appraisal depends not only on formal procedures but also on how those procedures are enacted and experienced.

The Ghanaian context provides an important setting for examining this issue. Teacher appraisal forms part of Ghana's broader professional development and teacher-management framework. The Pre-Tertiary Teacher Professional Development and Management Policy Framework links teacher management with professional development, career progression, quality assurance and appraisal (Ministry of Education & Ghana Education Service [MOE & GES], 2012). The National Teachers' Standards provide a common framework for teachers' professional knowledge, practice, conduct and attitudes (National Teaching Council [NTC], 2017). The Teacher Performance Management Handbook further presents appraisal as a process through which appraisers and teachers can discuss performance, identify targets and competencies, and determine areas requiring support and development (National Teaching Council & Ghana Education Service, n.d.). Thus, Ghana's policy architecture gives appraisal a developmental purpose alongside its accountability function.

Empirical evidence, however, suggests that the implementation of this policy orientation is uneven. Oduro (1998) argued that teacher appraisal in Ghana needed to move beyond accountability towards teacher development. More recent studies have reported generally positive perceptions of appraisal in some settings, while also identifying concerns about fairness, appraiser competence, feedback, and the use of appraisal outcomes for professional development (Kyei & Atta Junior, 2021; Kumah & Amoako, 2023). Annan et al. (2023) found that summative evaluation received greater emphasis than formative evaluation among junior high school teachers and supervisors in the Oforikrom Municipality, with implications for subjectivity and the connection between evaluation and professional development. Other Ghanaian studies have examined associations between appraisal and teacher effectiveness in public basic schools (Achaa, 2023; Kumah & Amoako, 2023). Although valuable, such studies provide limited insight into how appraisal is enacted in everyday school settings and why the same formal system may be experienced differently across schools.

This gap is important because appraisal is inherently relational. Headteachers or other appraisers interpret evidence and communicate judgements about teachers' work, while teachers determine whether those judgements are credible, fair and sufficiently supportive to inform professional reflection. Consequently, the developmental value of appraisal may depend on what occurs between formal evaluation and subsequent professional action. A qualitative approach is therefore appropriate for examining teachers' and headteachers' experiences of appraisal, their interpretations of its contribution to professional and instructional practice, and the organisational and relational conditions that enable or constrain its developmental use. The study does not seek to establish a causal relationship between appraisal and teacher effectiveness. Rather, it examines the processes through which appraisal may support or constrain professional learning and instructional improvement. The present study addresses this gap through a qualitative case study of teacher performance appraisal in selected public basic schools in the Bibiani-Anhwiaso-Bekwai Municipality of Ghana. It examines how appraisal is implemented, how teachers and headteachers perceive its contribution to professional and instructional practice, and the organisational and relational conditions shaping its developmental use.

1.1 Research Questions

- i. How is teacher performance appraisal implemented in selected public basic schools in the Bibiani-Anhwiaso-Bekwai Municipality?
- ii. How do teachers and headteachers perceive the contribution of appraisal practices to teachers' professional and instructional practice?
- iii. What organisational and relational conditions enable or constrain the developmental use of teacher performance appraisal?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Review

2.1.1 Goal-Setting Theory (GST)

Goal-Setting Theory (GST) provides a useful explanation of how appraisal can support professional learning. Locke and Latham (2002) argue that specific goals, commitment to those goals, and feedback on progress can direct effort and influence performance. Applied to appraisal, GST suggests that developmental value is enhanced when teachers participate in establishing meaningful professional goals, receive specific information about their practice, and have opportunities to review progress. Delvaux et al. (2013) and Tuytens and Devos (2014) provide empirical support for the importance of feedback and teacher participation. However, GST gives less attention to the relational conditions under which teachers accept and act on externally structured goals. Feedback may be technically appropriate yet have limited value when teachers experience fear, mistrust, or unfairness.

2.1.2 Self-Determination Theory

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) provides a complementary perspective. Ryan and Deci (2000a, 2000b) identify autonomy, competence, and relatedness as central psychological needs and distinguish autonomous engagement

from motivation arising primarily through external control. In appraisal, autonomy may be supported when teachers participate in identifying professional goals and developmental priorities; competence may be strengthened through constructive feedback that clarifies how practice can improve; and relatedness may be supported through respectful relationships with appraisers. Niemiec and Ryan (2009) similarly emphasise the importance of autonomy, competence and relatedness for engagement in educational settings.

Goal-setting, feedback, involvement, and supporting relationships can all have an impact on the progressive use of evaluation, as explained by GST and SDT together. GST highlights goals, feedback and progress, whereas SDT draws attention to autonomy, competence, relatedness, and the motivational quality of the appraisal relationship. These perspectives are useful for understanding why a formally standardised appraisal system may generate different experiences across schools.

2.2 Empirical Review

2.2.1 Implementation of Teacher Performance Appraisal in Public Basic Schools

Teacher performance appraisal comprises systematic processes for assessing teachers' professional performance against specified standards, expectations or objectives. Appraisal may serve several purposes, including accountability, performance improvement, professional development, promotion and the identification of training needs. However, the extent to which these purposes are realised depends on how appraisal is implemented within schools. Oduro (1998), writing in the Ghanaian context, argued that teacher appraisal should move beyond accountability towards teacher development. This distinction highlights the potential gap between the formal objectives of appraisal and its actual implementation, as a system intended to promote professional growth may be experienced primarily as an evaluative or compliance-oriented exercise.

In Ghana, teacher appraisal operates within an established policy framework that connects teacher performance management with professional standards and development. The Ministry of Education and Ghana Education Service (2012) situate teacher development within the broader management of the teaching workforce, while the National Teaching Council (2017) provides professional standards relating to teachers' knowledge, practice and professional values. The National Teaching Council and Ghana Education Service (n.d.) also provide a professional requirements manual for performance management. These policy instruments establish a formal basis for assessing teacher performance and connecting appraisal with professional development.

Empirical studies in Ghana have examined how appraisal is practised and perceived in different educational contexts. Danku et al. (2015), studying basic school teachers in Ho Municipality, reported frustration and dissatisfaction with aspects of performance appraisal. In contrast, Kyei and Atta Junior (2021), using a mixed-methods approach in the Birim Central Directorate, reported generally positive perceptions and satisfaction with the appraisal system. These contrasting findings suggest that appraisal may be implemented and experienced differently across educational settings. Achaa (2023) examined appraisal and teacher effectiveness among public basic school teachers in the Kwahu East District, while Kumah and Amoako (2023) investigated appraisal practices in public junior high schools in the Krachi Nchumuru District. Annan et al. (2023) also examined teacher evaluation in relation to professional development among junior high school teachers in Ghana.

International and African studies provide further insights into the implementation of appraisal. Abelha et al. (2020), in a qualitative case study of two teacher-training schools in Benguela, Angola, found that appraisal had the potential to support professional development, critical reflection, and self-regulation. However, the developmental potential of appraisal depends on how evaluation procedures are enacted and integrated into school practices. Perumalsamy et al. (2024), in a qualitative South African case study, demonstrated that educators' experiences of developmental appraisal were shaped by perceptions of social justice and injustice.

Collectively, these studies establish that teacher appraisal is embedded in formal policy frameworks but may be implemented and experienced differently across schools. Nevertheless, limited qualitative attention has been given to how appraisal procedures are carried out in everyday practice in public basic schools in the Bibiani-Anhwiaso-Bekwai Municipality. The present study addresses this gap by examining how appraisal is implemented, including how appraisal procedures are enacted and how teachers and headteachers experience the process.

2.2.2 Perceived Contributions of Teacher Performance Appraisal to Teachers' Professional and Instructional Practice

Teacher performance appraisal is frequently presented as a mechanism for improving professional practice, strengthening instructional performance and identifying teachers' professional-development needs. However, the relationship between appraisal and professional learning is not automatic. Its developmental value depends on whether appraisal generates meaningful feedback and whether teachers use the information to reflect on and improve their practice.

International evidence highlights the conditional relationship between appraisal and professional development. Delvaux et al. (2013), in a multilevel study of 1,983 teachers in 65 Flemish schools, found that the overall effect of

teacher evaluation on professional development was limited, although useful feedback was positively associated with professional-development outcomes. Similarly, Tuytens and Devos (2017), in a qualitative study across eight schools, found that teachers used evaluation feedback in their practice, while organisational characteristics and leadership shaped how they responded to it. Taylor and Tyler (2012) also demonstrated that teacher evaluation can be associated with improvements in teacher performance, although such improvements do not necessarily explain how teachers interpret or respond to appraisal.

African studies similarly emphasise the potential contribution of appraisal to professional learning. Abelha et al. (2020) found that performance appraisal could support professional development, critical reflection and self-regulation. In Kenya, Kariuki and Guantai (2020) argued that appraisal reports should be used more effectively to identify teachers' professional-development needs. These findings suggest that appraisal can help teachers recognise areas for improvement and reflect on their professional practice, but identifying developmental needs is of limited value unless appropriate learning opportunities and institutional support are available.

Evidence from Ghana also highlights the perceived contribution of appraisal to teacher effectiveness and professional development. Achaa (2023) examined the relationship between appraisal and teacher effectiveness among public basic school teachers in the Kwahu East District. Kumah and Amoako (2023), in their study of public junior high schools in the Krachi Nchumuru District, reported a positive statistical relationship between appraisal practices and teacher effectiveness. Annan et al. (2023) examined teacher evaluation in relation to professional development among junior high school teachers in Ghana. These studies provide a basis for understanding the potential contribution of appraisal to teachers' professional and instructional practice. However, evidence of a statistical relationship between appraisal and teacher effectiveness does not fully explain how teachers and headteachers understand appraisal's contribution to instructional planning, classroom practices, professional reflection and the identification of learning needs. Nor does it establish whether teachers translate appraisal feedback into sustained changes in their professional practice.

The present study therefore explores how teachers and headteachers perceive the contribution of appraisal to teachers' professional and instructional practice in selected public basic schools in the Bibiani-Anhwiaso-Bekwai Municipality. Particular attention is given to how appraisal is understood to support professional reflection, instructional improvement, the identification of developmental needs and the application of feedback in teaching practice.

2.2.3 Organisational and Relational Conditions Enabling or Constraining the Developmental Use of Teacher Performance Appraisal

The developmental use of teacher performance appraisal is shaped by organisational and relational conditions that influence how appraisal information is generated, interpreted and translated into professional action. These conditions include leadership practices, feedback quality, teacher participation, collaboration, trust, fairness, evaluator competence and access to professional-development opportunities.

Feedback, Leadership and Organisational Support: Feedback is a central mechanism through which appraisal can contribute to professional learning. Delvaux et al. (2013) found that useful feedback was associated with stronger professional-development outcomes, indicating that the developmental value of appraisal depends more on the quality and usability of information generated than on the mere occurrence of evaluation. Tuytens and Devos (2011) demonstrated that school leadership influenced the usefulness of evaluation feedback and, indirectly, professional learning. In a study of 32 secondary schools, Tuytens and Devos (2014) found that school leadership, teacher participation and collaboration were associated with feedback utility and professional-learning activities. These findings suggest that leadership and organisational arrangements influence whether appraisal feedback becomes a resource for professional development. The competence of appraisers is another important organisational consideration. Kraft and Christian (2022), through an administrator-training experiment, demonstrated that producing high-quality evaluation feedback is challenging and can be improved through evaluator training. This highlights the importance of developing headteachers' capacity to provide constructive, specific and actionable feedback.

These studies suggest that appraisal can generate evidence and feedback that stimulate reflection and goal setting, but its developmental contribution depends on teachers' meaningful engagement and the availability of opportunities and support to act on the information received. **Trust, Fairness and Relational Dynamics:** Trust, fairness and the quality of relationships between headteachers and teachers are particularly important because appraisal involves an asymmetrical relationship between appraisers and those being assessed. The manner in which appraisal is conducted may influence teachers' willingness to accept feedback, participate in professional discussions, and use appraisal information for improvement.

Tuytens and Devos (2011) found that instructional and transformational leadership were associated with feedback utility and professional learning. Perceptions of unfairness or subjectivity may undermine confidence in appraisal, even where formal procedures are established. Conversely, transparent criteria, meaningful participation and evidence-based feedback can strengthen its legitimacy. Perumalsamy et al. (2024), in a qualitative South African case study, found that educators experienced developmental appraisal partly through the lens of social justice and injustice.

Their findings demonstrate that appraisal cannot be separated from the power relations and organisational conditions within which evaluation occurs. These relational and contextual factors may influence whether teachers perceive appraisal as supportive, fair and developmental or as a process primarily concerned with compliance and control.

Institutional Capacity, Professional Development and Constraints: The developmental use of appraisal also depends on institutional capacity and the availability of opportunities for professional learning. Kariuki and Guantai (2020) emphasised the need to use appraisal reports more effectively to identify teachers' professional-development needs. However, identifying such needs does not necessarily result in professional improvement unless schools and relevant educational authorities provide appropriate support. Similarly, Perumalsamy et al. (2024) demonstrated how contextual and relational conditions could weaken the developmental promise of appraisal. In Ghana, Kumah and Amoako (2023) identified appraisal errors, including bias, similarity, contrast, and leniency, alongside concerns about fairness. These findings highlight the possibility that weaknesses in appraisal procedures may undermine confidence in the system and limit its developmental contribution. The literature therefore suggests that appraisal becomes developmental when schools provide supportive leadership, constructive feedback, meaningful teacher participation, fair assessment procedures, and opportunities for professional learning. Conversely, limited institutional support, inadequate evaluator capacity, perceptions of unfairness, and compliance-oriented practices may constrain the use of appraisal for professional improvement.

Despite these insights, there remains limited qualitative understanding of how these organisational and relational conditions interact in the everyday implementation of appraisal in public basic schools in the Bibiani-Anhwiaso-Bekwai Municipality. The present study addresses this gap by examining the conditions that enable or constrain the developmental use of appraisal, with particular attention to leadership, feedback, participation, trust, fairness and institutional support. The reviewed literature demonstrates that teacher performance appraisal serves multiple purposes, including accountability, performance improvement and professional development. International and African studies indicate that appraisal can contribute to professional learning, but its developmental value depends on how it is implemented and the organisational and relational conditions within which it operates.

In Ghana, existing studies have examined teachers' perceptions of appraisal, satisfaction with appraisal systems, appraisal practices and associations between appraisal and teacher effectiveness. However, the findings reveal variation in how appraisal is experienced and highlight concerns about fairness, bias and the use of appraisal information. Although these studies provide valuable evidence, they do not fully explain how appraisal is enacted in everyday school practice, how teachers and headteachers understand its contribution to professional and instructional practice, or why appraisal may become developmental in some contexts while remaining primarily administrative in others. The principal research gap is therefore the limited qualitative explanation of the processes and conditions through which formal appraisal becomes a meaningful mechanism for professional learning or remains largely compliance-oriented. In particular, the organisational and relational dynamics shaping the developmental use of appraisal in public basic schools in the Bibiani-Anhwiaso-Bekwai Municipality remain insufficiently understood.

The present study addresses this gap through an interpretivist qualitative case study of selected public basic schools in the Bibiani-Anhwiaso-Bekwai Municipality. It examines how appraisal is implemented, how teachers and headteachers perceive its contribution to professional and instructional practice, and which organisational and relational conditions enable or constrain its developmental use. The analytical framework combines Goal-Setting Theory (GST) and Self-Determination Theory (SDT) to examine the processes through which appraisal evidence and feedback may inform professional reflection, goal setting and instructional action. GST draws attention to goal clarity, feedback, and progress, while SDT highlights autonomy, competence, relatedness, and motivation. Together, these perspectives provide a basis for understanding appraisal as a conditional developmental process rather than assuming a direct causal relationship between appraisal and teacher effectiveness.

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

The study was located within an interpretivist paradigm and employed a qualitative case study design. An interpretivist orientation was appropriate because the study sought to understand how teachers and headteachers interpreted and experienced teacher performance appraisal within the organisational settings in which it was enacted. The case was bounded geographically by the Bibiani-Anhwiaso-Bekwai Municipality, institutionally by public basic schools operating under the Ghana Education Service (GES), and substantively by the implementation and developmental use of teacher performance appraisal. The case study design was appropriate because appraisal was embedded in leadership practices, organisational routines and interpersonal relationships that could not be meaningfully separated from the phenomenon under investigation (Yin, 2018).

The study was explanatory in a qualitative sense. It did not seek to estimate the effect of appraisal on teacher effectiveness or student outcomes. Instead, it examined the processes and conditions through which participants perceived appraisal as contributing to, constraining, or failing to translate into professional and instructional practice.

This distinction was maintained throughout the analysis to avoid treating participants' accounts of change as evidence of causal effects.

3.2 Study Area and Case Boundaries

The study was conducted in five public basic schools in the Bibiani-Anhwiaso-Bekwai Municipality of Ghana. The schools were purposively selected to provide contextual variation across urban, peri-urban, and rural settings. Two schools were urban, two were peri-urban, and one was rural. The study focused on public basic schools because teacher performance appraisal in these schools operates within the GES policy and management framework. Private schools and second-cycle institutions were outside the case boundary. The case boundary was important analytically. The study makes no claim that the experiences reported by participants represent all public basic schools in Ghana. Rather, the bounded case provides an opportunity to examine how a common formal appraisal framework was interpreted and enacted under different organisational and relational conditions within one municipal education system.

3.3 Target Population

The target population comprised headteachers, senior teachers with appraisal-related responsibilities, and classroom teachers in public basic schools in the municipality who had direct experience of teacher performance appraisal. These groups occupied different positions within the appraisal relationship. Headteachers were responsible for school leadership and appraisal-related activities, senior teachers contributed to appraisal-related processes, and classroom teachers experienced appraisal as appraisees. Including these perspectives enabled the analysis to examine both evaluative and recipient positions within the same organisational process.

3.4 Sampling and Sample Size

Purposive criterion sampling was used to recruit participants with direct and sufficiently recent experience of teacher performance appraisal. Eligibility required participants to be headteachers, senior teachers with appraisal-related responsibilities, or classroom teachers who had participated in the appraisal process and were willing to provide informed consent. The final sample comprised 25 participants: five headteachers, one senior teacher with appraisal-related responsibilities, and 19 classroom teachers.

Table 1 presents the distribution of the 25 participants by role and data-collection method, comprising 12 individual interviews and 13 participants in focus group discussions.

Table 1

Distribution of participants across data-collection methods and roles

Participant Category	Individual Interviews	Focus groups	Total
Headteachers	5	0	5
Senior teachers with appraisal-related responsibilities	1	0	1
Classroom teachers	6	13	19
Total	12	13	25

The two focus groups comprised six and seven classroom teachers, respectively. Individual interviews were conducted with all five headteachers, one senior teacher and six classroom teachers. This design enabled comparison across participant roles and data sources. Sampling was guided by information adequacy rather than a numerical representativeness criterion. During data collection, the research team assessed whether subsequent accounts continued to add substantively new codes, relationships or explanations relevant to the three research questions. Preliminary saturation appeared during the tenth individual interview and first focus group. Two additional individual interviews and one additional focus group were then examined specifically for conceptual novelty and divergent evidence. These later accounts elaborated existing patterns but did not generate a substantively new overarching theme. The final sample was therefore considered sufficient for the bounded case, while recognising that qualitative saturation is an analytic judgement rather than a universal numerical threshold.

3.5 Research Team, Positionality and Reflexivity

Data were collected and analysed by a three-member research team comprising two lecturers at the University of Education, Winneba and one Master's student of the same university. The two lecturers had experience in qualitative educational and organisational research and provided methodological oversight. The Master's student had training in qualitative research and participated in interviewing, transcription checking, coding, and data organisation under the supervision of the lecturers.

The researchers were not involved in the participants' formal appraisal decisions. This separation was important because appraisal involves hierarchical relationships that may inhibit critical disclosure. Nevertheless, the researchers' professional identities as university lecturers could have shaped participants' assumptions about the study and their

willingness to discuss weaknesses in school-level appraisal. The team therefore treated positionality as an analytic consideration rather than assuming that researcher independence was complete.

Reflexive notes were maintained throughout data collection and analysis. These notes documented assumptions, emerging interpretations, methodological decisions and disagreements within the research team. Particular attention was paid to the possibility that participants might moderate criticism of school leaders or the GES appraisal system. Interviews were conducted privately where possible, participation was voluntary, and confidentiality was emphasised. During analysis, the researchers actively examined interpretations that appeared too readily consistent with the initial theoretical expectations.

3.6 Data Collection Instruments and Pilot Testing

Data were generated through semi-structured individual interviews and two focus group discussions. Separate interview and focus-group guides were developed from the research questions and literature on teacher appraisal, feedback, professional development, and teacher effectiveness. The guides addressed appraisal procedures, observation, self-evaluation, feedback, goal setting, perceived fairness, trust, leadership, professional development, implementation constraints, and perceived changes in professional practice. Open-ended questions and probes were used to elicit detailed accounts while allowing participants to introduce issues not anticipated by the researchers. The instruments were pilot-tested with participants who had characteristics similar to those of the target population but who were not included in the final study. The pilot assessed clarity, sequencing, relevance, language, probing, and interview duration. Ambiguous or repetitive questions were revised before fieldwork, and pilot data were excluded from the final analysis.

3.7 Data Collection Procedure

Data collection took place between October and November 2025. Permission was obtained from the Bibiani-Anhwiaso-Bekwai Municipal Education Directorate and the participating schools. Participants received information about the purpose of the study, voluntary participation, confidentiality, and their right to decline questions or withdraw without penalty. Written informed consent was obtained before each interview and focus group.

Individual interviews were conducted face-to-face in quiet and private locations within the participating schools and lasted approximately 30–45 minutes. With permission, interviews were audio-recorded and supplemented by field notes concerning contextual observations, issues requiring further probing, and preliminary analytical reflections. The two focus groups involved six and seven teachers and lasted approximately 45–60 minutes. A member of the research team facilitated each discussion, encouraged balanced participation, and prevented individual participants from dominating the discussion. Focus groups were audio-recorded with consent and supplemented by field notes on group interaction. Data collection and analysis proceeded iteratively. After each interview or focus group, the team reviewed emerging material and identified issues requiring clarification or additional probing. This iterative process allowed the researchers to explore emerging patterns while maintaining sufficient consistency across participants.

3.8 Data Analysis

Audio recordings were transcribed verbatim and checked against the recordings by members of the research team. Local expressions and contextual terminology were retained where necessary to preserve participants' intended meanings. Each participant was assigned an anonymous identification code, and identifying information was removed before analysis and reporting. The transcripts, field notes and analytical documents were imported into NVivo for data management. NVivo was used to organise, retrieve and compare coded material across participants, schools and data sources. Interpretation remained the responsibility of the research team.

The data were analysed using the six-phase thematic analysis approach of Braun and Clarke (2006). Analysis was primarily inductive while remaining sensitised by the research questions and the study's theoretical framework. The researchers first familiarised themselves with the transcripts and recorded preliminary observations in analytical memos. Initial codes were generated segment by segment. Related codes were compared within and across interviews and focus groups and grouped into candidate categories and themes. Candidate themes were reviewed against coded extracts and the dataset as a whole for internal coherence, distinctiveness and evidential adequacy. Negative and divergent cases were deliberately sought rather than treating dominant patterns as universal. Themes were then defined and named according to their central patterns of meaning and developed into an integrated analytical account.

Coding was collaborative. An initial subset of transcripts was independently coded by the two lecturers and the Master's student. Differences were discussed, and coding boundaries were refined through critical dialogue. This exercise was used to challenge premature interpretations and identify overlooked meanings rather than to produce a numerical inter-coder reliability coefficient. The remaining transcripts were coded using the refined framework, with periodic team reviews of codes, categories, and themes. Analytical memos and an audit trail documented changes to the coding framework and decisions concerning theme development. A second analytical step was undertaken after theme development to align the empirical patterns explicitly with the three research questions. This step did not create new data or overwrite the inductive analysis. Rather, it reorganised the already established themes around the questions that

the study was designed to answer. This distinction is important because the five empirical patterns are analytically interrelated, whereas the three research questions provide the manuscript's principal reporting structure.

3.9 Trustworthiness and Qualitative Quality

Trustworthiness was considered through credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), while reporting was informed by COREQ (Tong et al., 2007). The procedures used to support quality are summarised in Table 2.

Table 2

Procedures used to establish qualitative quality

Quality Criterion	Procedures Used in the Study	Analytical Purpose
Credibility	Triangulation across interviews and focus groups; comparison across headteachers, senior teachers and classroom teachers; iterative probing; member checking; negative-case examination; collaborative analysis	To test whether interpretations were supported across perspectives and to identify evidence that complicated dominant patterns
Transferability	Description of case boundaries, school contexts, participant roles and appraisal processes	To enable readers to judge the relevance of findings to other settings rather than claiming statistical generalisability
Dependability	Audit trail covering sampling, instrument development, data collection, transcription, coding and theme development; documented analytic decisions	To make the research process traceable and internally coherent
Confirmability	Reflexive notes; preservation of audit trail; collaborative challenge of interpretations; direct grounding of claims in participant accounts	To reduce the risk that findings reflected unexamined researcher assumptions
Negative-case analysis	Deliberate examination of later interviews and focus-group material for divergent accounts and evidence inconsistent with emerging themes	To prevent dominant accounts from being presented as uniform experience

Member checking involved returning selected interview summaries and interpretations to participants for clarification of meaning. Participants were invited to identify factual inaccuracies or interpretations that did not adequately represent their intended meanings, and any necessary amendments were incorporated before final analysis. Quotations included in the manuscript were checked against the original transcripts before reporting. The study does not claim statistical generalisability. Instead, transferability rests on contextual description and on the extent to which readers judge the case and mechanisms to be relevant to other settings.

3.10 Ethical Considerations

Permission was obtained from the Bibiani-Anhwiaso-Bekwai Municipal Education Directorate and participating schools. Participants were informed about the study and provided written informed consent. Participation was voluntary, and participants could decline to answer questions or withdraw without penalty. Because the study concerned workplace appraisal and relationships between teachers and school leaders, particular attention was given to confidentiality. Names and identifiable institutional information were removed from transcripts and reports, and anonymous participant codes were used. Audio files, transcripts, and field notes were stored on password-protected devices accessible only to the research team. Focus-group participants were informed that confidentiality could not be completely guaranteed because other participants would hear their contributions and were asked not to disclose discussions outside the group.

Participants were assigned anonymous identification codes to protect their identities and to distinguish clearly between the different data sources. Headteachers were coded HT1–HT5, the senior teacher was coded ST1, and classroom teachers who participated in individual interviews were coded INT-CT1–INT-CT6. Classroom teachers who participated in Focus Group 1 were coded FG1-CT1–FG1-CT6, while those who participated in Focus Group 2 were coded FG2-CT1–FG2-CT7. The focus-group identifiers were group-specific, and the participant register confirmed that no classroom teacher participated in both focus groups. These codes are used consistently throughout the findings to identify the source of each quotation while preserving participant anonymity.

IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

4.1 Findings

The thematic analysis generated five interrelated themes concerning how teacher performance appraisal was implemented and experienced across the participating schools. Five interrelated themes emerged: (1) formal

standardisation and variable enactment; (2) feedback usability and instructional adjustment; (3) teacher agency and participation; (4) relational legitimacy, trust and fairness; and (5) organisational capacity and support. The themes addressed the three research questions collectively rather than mapping one-to-one onto individual research questions. Table 3 shows the relationship between the research questions and the five themes.

Table 3

Alignment of research questions with the five themes

Research question	Themes addressing the research question
RQ1. How is teacher performance appraisal implemented in selected public basic schools?	Theme 1: Formal standardisation and variable enactment;
RQ2. How do teachers and headteachers perceive the contribution of appraisal to professional and instructional practice?	Theme 2: Feedback usability and instructional adjustment;
RQ3. What organisational and relational conditions enable or constrain the developmental use of teacher performance appraisal?	Theme 3: Teacher agency and participation; Theme 4: Relational legitimacy, trust and fairness; Theme 5: Organisational capacity and support

4.1.1 How is Teacher Performance Appraisal Implemented in Selected Public Basic Schools?

Theme 1: Formal standardisation and variable enactment

Participants consistently described the Ghana Education Service (GES) appraisal framework as the formal system governing teacher evaluation. The assessment domains reported by participants included lesson preparation and planning, instructional delivery, classroom management, student engagement, professional conduct, punctuality and attendance, and participation in school activities. Teachers also completed a self-evaluation component. Headteachers were described as the principal school-level appraisers, with circuit supervisors providing an additional layer of oversight. A headteacher described the formal process as follows:

“The system we use is the one mandated by the Ghana Education Service. Each teacher receives a score based on areas like lesson preparation, classroom management, professional conduct, time management, and relationship with students and colleagues. At the end of the year, I sit with each teacher, we review the form, and they sign it. The form is then submitted to the circuit supervisor.” (HT5, 10th Oct. 2025)

A senior teacher similarly distinguished between the formal structure and its implementation:

“It is a structured system, based on the GES framework. There are defined criteria and a scoring sheet. At the beginning of the year, teachers are supposed to be aware of what they will be assessed on. In terms of structure, the system is clear on paper. In practice, it is a different story. The forms do get completed, but the depth of the process varies.” (ST1, 10th Oct. 2025)

Variation in enactment was also associated with school-level leadership practices. One headteacher described providing teachers with explicit information about appraisal expectations:

“We follow the GES framework, which is the standard. But I have tried to add some structure to how we implement it here. At the beginning of each academic year, I hold a staff meeting where I go through the appraisal criteria with all teachers. I want everyone to be clear on what is expected from the start, not to find out at the end of the year.” (HT2, 17th Oct. 2025)

Participants also reported a difference between the expectation of continuous appraisal and the practical experience of annual appraisal. HT1 explained:

“Officially, the GES expects continuous appraisal, meaning monitoring should happen throughout the year. But in reality, we do the formal appraisal once a year, at the end of the academic year. I try to do mid-year check-ins, but these are informal. Time is always a challenge.” (HT1, 10th Oct. 2025)

The timing and frequency of classroom observation provided a further indication of variation in implementation.

A participant in the first focus group reported:

“We all know the observation is coming before it happens. The headteacher usually announces it a week in advance. So everyone prepares extra carefully that particular day. It is not a realistic picture of how we teach every day. Real monitoring should be unannounced sometimes.” (FG1-CT5, 7th Nov. 2025)

Another participant described the effect of advance notification:

“When I know I am being observed, I put on a [performance]. I bring extra materials, I engage students more actively, I am very structured. If the observation is always announced, the headteacher is not seeing my typical practice.” (FG1-CT6, 7th Nov. 2025)

These accounts show that the existence of a common appraisal framework did not result in identical implementation across the participating schools. Participants described variation in the frequency of appraisal activities, the timing of observations, the extent of dialogue, and the degree to which appraisal extended beyond completion of the

4.1.2 How Do Teachers and Headteachers Perceive the Contribution of Appraisal to Professional and Instructional Practice?

Participants reported that appraisal could contribute to professional and instructional practice when feedback was specific, timely, and actionable. The reported areas of adjustment included questioning, pacing, lesson preparation, use of teaching materials, student engagement, and checking for understanding. One participant described feedback that was directly incorporated into classroom practice:

“After every classroom observation, I write up brief observation notes and share them with the teacher within forty-eight hours. I do not wait for the end of the year. The formula I use is: strength, strength, strength, growth area. Teachers respond well to this approach. They do not feel attacked. They feel supported.” (HT2, 17th Oct. 2025)

“I think the timing of feedback matters as much as the content. I received feedback last December about something I did in September. By December, I cannot even remember the specific lesson they are referring to. Feedback should be much closer to the observation.” (FG1-CT5, 7th Nov. 2025)

“After my last appraisal, I was told I need to improve student participation. But the headteacher did not say how. He did not give me any examples or strategies. So I did not really know where to start. Good feedback should show you what to change and give you a direction on how to change it.” (INT-CT2, 24th Oct. 2025)

“In twenty years, I have had maybe three pieces of feedback that I remember as genuinely useful. The rest has been generic. I do not blame headteachers entirely. They are busy, they have many teachers to assess, and the system does not give them enough time to do this properly.” (FG1-CT4, 7th Nov. 2025)

“It has made me more conscious of how I plan my lessons. When I know the headteacher might come in at any time, I make sure my lesson notes are ready and that I am using appropriate materials. It has also pushed me to think more about how I engage students.” (INT-CT4, 31st Oct. 2025)

“My headteacher observed that I was moving through content too quickly for the lower-achieving students in the class. He suggested I build in more checking-for-understanding moments. I adopted a practice of doing a quick recap activity every fifteen minutes in my lessons. It has made a difference in how much students retain.” (FG2-CT6, 21st Nov. 2025)

"After I introduced the goal-setting component, teachers began asking me for resources and ideas related to their goals. I see more group activities, more pair work, more student presentations than when I first arrived. Our end-of-year assessment results have also improved slightly over the past two years, which I partly attribute to improved engagement in the classroom." (HT2, 17th Oct. 2025)

"I think the influence is more about compliance than genuine change. Teachers prepare to be observed. Once the observation is done, some slip back into old routines. The headteacher's classroom observations

have also prompted some teachers to vary their teaching methods, but whether those changes are sustained is another question." (ST1, 10th Oct. 2025)

The data consequently contained contrasting accounts of appraisal-related change. Some participants described specific instructional adjustments, while others emphasised temporary preparation for observation and uncertainty about whether changes were sustained.

4.1.3 What Organisational and Relational Conditions Enable or Constrain the Developmental Use of Teacher Performance Appraisal?

Theme 3: Teacher agency and participation

Teacher participation emerged in participants' accounts as an important feature of how appraisal was experienced. Participants referred particularly to self-evaluation, participation in appraisal conversations and opportunities to identify areas for improvement.

One teacher described self-evaluation as an opportunity for reflection:

"When I fill in the self-evaluation section, I try to be honest. I know where I am strong and where I still struggle. Classroom management with large class sizes is something I always score myself lower on. The headteacher and I usually agree on most areas. When we disagree, he explains his reasoning, and I mostly understand it." (INT-CT1, 24th Oct. 2025)

HT2 described using self-evaluation as the starting point for an appraisal conversation:

"I take the self-evaluation part of the GES form seriously. Before the end-of-year meeting, I ask teachers to complete their self-evaluation and bring it to the meeting. I start by asking the teacher what they think went well this year and what they feel they want to work on. I listen first. Then I share my perspective. This conversation is much richer than just exchanging forms. Teachers feel heard." (HT2, 17th Oct. 2025)

However, participants reported variation in engagement with self-evaluation. ST1 observed:

"I do see some teachers taking it seriously. A few of the younger teachers especially approach it thoughtfully, listing their own areas of weakness quite honestly. But I have also noticed that some experienced teachers fill in high scores for themselves across all areas. When the head gives them a lower score, they sometimes argue about it." (ST1, 10th Oct. 2025)

Another participant placed greater value on personal reflection than on formal appraisal feedback:

"I actually motivate myself more through my own reflection after lessons. I ask myself what went well and what did not. The official appraisal feedback does not add much to that personal reflection. I think if the feedback were more specific and actionable, I would value the process more." (FG1-CT2, 7th Nov. 2025)

Thus, participation varied from substantive engagement with professional practice to more limited completion of the formal appraisal requirements.

Theme 4: Relational legitimacy, trust and fairness

Participants' accounts showed that appraisal occurred within relationships characterised by both professional authority and interpersonal familiarity. Headteachers were simultaneously evaluators and immediate supervisors. Participants consequently discussed the implications of trust, power, interpersonal relationships and perceived fairness. HT4 acknowledged the possible influence of interpersonal relationships:

"In a small school community, we know each other well. Some teachers are personal friends. It is difficult to give someone a low score when you share a meal with them regularly. I try to be objective, but I will not pretend there are no human dynamics involved. Familiarity can lead to leniency. On the other hand, if there is personal conflict between a headteacher and a teacher, that can also bias the appraisal." (HT4, 28th Nov. 2025)

The hierarchical relationship between teachers and headteachers was also described as affecting teachers' willingness to challenge appraisal judgements. FG1-CT5 explained:

"There is a power dynamic. The headteacher is assessing me, and they are also my immediate supervisor. If I challenge my appraisal score, I risk damaging our working relationship. There is no independent appeal mechanism." (FG1-CT5, 7th Nov. 2025)

Another participant emphasised the emotional dimension of the appraisal relationship:

"Being appraised is a vulnerable experience. You are being judged, and the relationship you have with the appraiser affects how you receive that judgement. In schools where there is a healthy culture, appraisals are conversations. In schools where there is fear or tension, appraisals become a source of stress. The emotional environment matters." (FG2-CT4, 21st Nov. 2025)

Documentation was identified as one practice used to support the credibility of appraisal judgements. HT2 explained:

"I document everything. My observation notes are written down, dated, and kept in a file for each teacher. If a teacher ever challenges a score, I have evidence. Having documentation helps to keep me honest." (HT2, 17th Oct. 2025)

The accounts therefore indicated that teachers' experiences of appraisal were shaped not only by the content of the appraisal but also by the relationships and procedures through which judgements were produced and communicated. *Theme 5: Organisational capacity and support*

Participants identified organisational capacity and institutional support as important conditions affecting the implementation and developmental use of appraisal. The reported conditions included time constraints, workload, appraiser preparation, subject-specific expertise and access to professional-development opportunities. Participants repeatedly described situations in which appraisal identified professional-development needs without reliably leading to training, mentoring, resources or other support. INT-CT1 explained:

"The headteacher has recommended I attend a workshop on literacy teaching methods. That recommendation has been on my appraisal form for two years, and the workshop has not happened. That is frustrating. It makes the recommendation feel like empty words." (INT-CT1, 24th Oct. 2025)

INT-CT2 similarly reported:

"I am told to do better in certain areas, but there is no support to help me do better. I have not been sent to any training based on my appraisal results. The appraisal happens, forms are submitted, and then nothing changes. I think this is a common experience for many teachers here." (INT-CT2, 24th Oct. 2025)

ST1 described a similar gap:

"I have seen teachers receive feedback suggesting they need training in special needs education, or in new mathematics teaching methods, and nothing happens. The GES does not always have training opportunities aligned to what individual teachers need. So the link between appraisal and actual professional development is very weak." (ST1, 10th Oct. 2025)

School leadership also recognised the problem. HT2 stated:

"I would require that appraisal outcomes are linked to a professional development action plan that the GES commits to funding or supporting. Without that commitment, the appraisal remains incomplete. We identify needs but do not address them." (HT2, 17th Oct. 2025)

A teacher in the second focus group similarly called for a stronger institutional connection:

"The GES should link appraisal outcomes directly to professional development allocations. If my appraisal says I need training in inquiry-based science teaching, fund that training and send me. Make the link real." (FG2-CT5, 21st Nov. 2025)

Time and workload were additional constraints. HT1 explained:

"Time is the biggest obstacle. I have a full teaching load myself, plus all the administrative responsibilities. Finding time to sit with each teacher for a proper appraisal meeting, do classroom observations, and then write up the forms is very demanding. Sometimes the appraisal forms are completed very close to the submission deadline, which means the process is rushed." (HT1, 10th Oct. 2025)

HT2 similarly described the demands associated with continuous appraisal:

"Doing observations twice per term for every teacher, writing up notes, holding post-observation conversations, conducting mid-year reviews, and then doing end-of-year appraisal meetings, all whilst teaching and managing the school, is genuinely demanding. I manage because I prioritise it, but I understand why many headteachers do not do it as thoroughly. The system must provide more time and fewer administrative distractions." (HT2, 17th Oct. 2025)

Participants also identified limitations in appraiser preparation. HT1 reported:

"Formally, I attended one workshop organised by the Municipal Education Office about four years ago. That was focused on how to use the GES appraisal form correctly. Apart from that, most of what I know comes from experience and guidance from my predecessors. I think more training would be helpful, honestly. The one workshop was good but not enough." (HT1, 10th Oct. 2025)

Subject-specific expertise was another concern. FG2-CT3 stated:

"I teach science, and when the headteacher comes to observe, I sometimes wonder whether they fully understand what I am teaching well enough to give meaningful feedback. That is a real limitation." (FG2-CT3, 21st Nov. 2025)

The accounts therefore identified constraints at several stages of the appraisal process. Organisational conditions affected the frequency and quality of observation, the time available for feedback and the feasibility of responding to identified professional-development needs.

4.1.4 Cross-theme Synthesis

Across the three research questions, participants' accounts converged around a process in which the developmental use of appraisal depended on the connection between several activities. Formal expectations provided the basis for appraisal; observation generated evidence about practice; feedback communicated areas for improvement; teacher participation provided opportunities for reflection; relationships influenced how judgements were received; and organisational capacity affected whether identified needs could be acted upon.

The data also revealed points at which this process could be interrupted. Formal requirements were not always enacted with the same frequency or depth. Observations could be announced in advance. Feedback could be delayed or insufficiently specific. Self-evaluation could range from substantive reflection to form completion. Power relationships could affect how appraisal judgements were received. Finally, identified professional-development needs did not consistently lead to training, mentoring, resources, or protected time. The five themes show that participants experienced appraisal as neither uniformly developmental nor merely administrative. Rather, its developmental character varied according to how the different elements of the process were connected in practice. The empirical findings therefore provide the basis for the interpretive analysis presented in the Discussion.

4.2 Discussion

The findings indicate that teacher performance appraisal in the participating schools operated as a formally standardised but variably enacted process. The GES framework provided common expectations and procedures, but participants' accounts showed considerable variation in how frequently appraisal activities occurred, how observations were conducted, how feedback was provided, and whether identified development needs received subsequent support. The findings therefore suggest that the developmental potential of appraisal was not determined by the existence of a formal appraisal instrument alone. It depended on the quality and continuity of the processes surrounding the instrument.

4.2.1 Formal Standardisation Does Not Guarantee Developmental Enactment

The distinction between formal standardisation and enactment is central to understanding the findings. Participants generally recognised the GES appraisal framework and its formal assessment domains. However, the presence of a common framework did not ensure comparable implementation across schools. The reported differences in observation frequency, feedback practices and follow-up indicate that implementation was mediated by local leadership and organisational conditions.

This finding is important because it shifts attention from appraisal design to appraisal enactment. A formally comprehensive appraisal system may satisfy procedural requirements without necessarily generating the repeated observation, professional dialogue, reflection and follow-up required for development. The distinction is consistent with Oduro's (1998) argument that teacher appraisal needs to extend beyond accountability towards teacher development. It is also compatible with Ghana's policy emphasis on linking teacher performance management with professional development (Ministry of Education & Ghana Education Service [MOE & GES], 2012; National Teaching Council [NTC], 2017).

The findings also raise an issue concerning the evidential basis of appraisal. Participants reported that classroom observations were sometimes announced in advance, allowing teachers to prepare specifically for the observation. This does not establish that teachers deliberately misrepresented their normal practice. Rather, it indicates that the observation conditions themselves could influence the behaviour being observed. From a measurement perspective, an announced observation may provide useful evidence of teachers' capacity to perform under evaluative conditions while providing less information about the consistency of routine practice. Consequently, repeated and appropriately varied evidence may be more informative than reliance on a single announced observation. The findings therefore suggest that implementation fidelity should not be conceptualised simply as completion of the prescribed appraisal form. For developmental appraisal, fidelity also concerns the continuity, quality and evidential adequacy of the activities surrounding the form.

4.2.2 Feedback as the Mechanism Linking Evaluation to Instructional Learning

A central interpretive finding is that feedback functioned as a mechanism connecting evaluative evidence with possible instructional adjustment. Participants did not describe all feedback as equally useful. Feedback was perceived as more valuable when it was specific, timely, and actionable. In particular, feedback that identified a particular instructional issue and provided an example or alternative approach was associated with reported changes in practice. This finding extends the conventional distinction between evaluation and development. Evaluation generates information about performance, but information becomes developmentally useful only when teachers can interpret it and identify a feasible response. The finding is consistent with Goal-Setting Theory, which assigns an important role to feedback in enabling individuals to assess progress towards desired performance (Locke & Latham, 2002). It also accords with previous research indicating that the developmental value of teacher evaluation is strongly related to the quality and usefulness of feedback (Delvaux et al., 2013; Tuytens & Devos, 2014, 2017).

The present findings add a process-oriented dimension to this literature. Participants' accounts suggest that useful feedback reduced uncertainty at two levels: it clarified what aspect of practice required attention and provided some indication of how improvement could be attempted. Feedback that communicated only that performance should improve left teachers with greater uncertainty about the appropriate response. Thus, the developmental function of appraisal appears to depend not simply on the presence of feedback but on its informational quality. At the same time, the findings do not justify interpreting reported instructional adjustments as evidence of improved teacher effectiveness.

The study did not independently measure classroom performance, student learning outcomes, or the persistence of changes over time. The evidence supports the narrower conclusion that participants perceived particular appraisal experiences as contributing to changes in instructional practice.

4.2.3 Appraisal can Stimulate Adjustment Without Necessarily Producing Sustained Professional Learning

The coexistence of reported instructional adjustment and compliance-oriented behaviour provides an important qualification to the developmental interpretation of appraisal. Some participants described changes that were incorporated into lesson planning or instructional routines. Other accounts suggested that teachers intensified preparation when an observation was imminent and subsequently returned to previous practices. This distinction is theoretically important. Within SDT, behaviour may be undertaken for different reasons, ranging from external regulation to more autonomous forms of engagement (Ryan & Deci, 2000a, 2000b). The present study did not measure participants' internal motivational states and therefore cannot classify their motivation empirically. Nevertheless, the contrasting accounts are consistent with the theoretical proposition that the meaning attached to an appraisal activity matters for the quality and persistence of engagement.

Where teachers understood the purpose of the feedback, participated in identifying goals and received opportunities to act on those goals, appraisal was described in more developmental terms. Where the immediate stimulus was an impending observation or completion requirement, the reported response was more compliance-oriented. The distinction suggests that the developmental potential of appraisal depends partly on whether teachers experience the process as an opportunity for improvement or primarily as an evaluative requirement.

This interpretation also helps explain why appraisal may produce visible short-term changes without necessarily generating sustained professional learning. Behavioural adaptation to an evaluative event may be sufficient to satisfy an immediate appraisal demand, whereas sustained professional learning requires opportunities for reflection, practice, feedback and subsequent review.

4.2.4 Teacher Agency is Central to the Developmental Meaning of Appraisal

The findings concerning self-evaluation and participation indicate that teacher agency is an important component of developmental appraisal. Self-evaluation was not uniformly experienced. In some accounts, it provided an opportunity for teachers to identify their own strengths and areas for improvement. In others, it appeared to function primarily as a formal requirement. This distinction has implications for the interpretation of appraisal as a developmental process. When teachers can articulate their own assessment of practice and discuss areas for improvement with the appraiser, appraisal becomes a two-way process rather than a unilateral judgement. Such participation can provide opportunities for teachers to exercise autonomy and engage with professional goals in ways that are consistent with SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2000b; Niemiec & Ryan, 2009).

The findings also suggest that participation should not be equated simply with the presence of a self-evaluation section on an appraisal form. A formal opportunity to self-evaluate does not necessarily constitute meaningful agency. Agency was more evident where teachers could explain their assessments, discuss differences with the appraiser and influence the identification of development priorities. This distinction contributes to the understanding of why identical appraisal procedures may have different developmental consequences. The formal structure can create an opportunity for participation, but the interactional conditions determine whether that opportunity is realised.

4.2.5 Relational Legitimacy and Procedural Fairness Shape the Credibility of Appraisal

The findings further indicate that appraisal is inherently relational. Headteachers occupied positions of both evaluator and immediate supervisor, while in some cases they also had close interpersonal relationships with teachers. Participants therefore raised concerns about familiarity, conflict, power asymmetry, leniency and the perceived ability to challenge appraisal judgements. These findings suggest that the credibility of appraisal depends partly on whether teachers regard the process as procedurally legitimate. A technically standardised appraisal instrument cannot by itself remove the relational influences associated with face-to-face evaluation. Participants' concerns about friendship or conflict do not establish that particular appraisal decisions were biased. Rather, they show that the possibility of relational influence was salient in participants' accounts and could affect confidence in the process.

The absence of an independent appeal mechanism was particularly significant in this regard. Where the evaluator is also the immediate supervisor, disagreement with an appraisal judgement may carry perceived relational costs. Documentation of observations emerged as one practical response. Dated records can provide an evidential basis for appraisal judgements, reduce reliance on retrospective memory and make subsequent discussions more transparent. Such documentation does not eliminate power asymmetry, but it may strengthen procedural credibility. The findings are consistent with the broader emphasis on fairness and justice in developmental appraisal (Perumalsamy et al., 2024). They also complement SDT by showing how relatedness and interpersonal climate may shape the context in which evaluative feedback is received. Respectful and trusting relationships may make difficult feedback more acceptable, whereas fear or interpersonal tension may reduce its developmental usefulness.

4.2.6 Organisational Capacity Determines whether Appraisal Recommendations Become Professional Learning

The strongest cross-theme finding concerns the relationship between appraisal and organisational support. Participants repeatedly described situations in which appraisal identified a professional-development need but the organisation did not consistently provide the training, mentoring, resources, time or specialist support required to address it. This finding extends the emphasis placed on feedback in previous research. Delvaux et al. (2013) demonstrated the importance of feedback for the developmental value of teacher evaluation, while Kariuki and Guantai (2020) emphasised the use of appraisal information to identify teachers' professional-development needs. The present findings suggest that identifying a need is not equivalent to addressing it. The developmental value of appraisal depends on whether the organisation has the capacity to support action following identification of the need.

The problem is therefore not located exclusively at the level of the teacher or the appraisal encounter. It also exists at the organisational level. Headteachers described competing teaching and administrative responsibilities, limited time and insufficient preparation. Teachers raised concerns about access to relevant training and the ability of generalist appraisers to provide subject-specific feedback. These constraints can affect the quality of observation, the timeliness of feedback, and the feasibility of subsequent professional development.

This finding is particularly relevant to GST. Goal identification and feedback can establish a direction for improvement, but progress towards a goal requires opportunities and resources through which the individual can act (Locke & Latham, 2002). Similarly, SDT emphasises the importance of contextual conditions that support autonomy, competence and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2000b). A system that identifies areas for improvement without providing realistic opportunities to address them may therefore weaken the developmental meaning of appraisal. The findings consequently position organisational capacity not merely as background context but as part of the mechanism through which appraisal becomes developmental.

4.2.7 An integrated Interpretation: From Appraisal to Professional Learning

The five themes support an integrated interpretation of appraisal as a conditional developmental process rather than a discrete administrative event. The process begins with formal expectations and the generation of evidence about practice. Its developmental potential depends on whether that evidence is converted into usable feedback, whether teachers participate in interpreting the feedback and setting priorities, whether the relational environment supports acceptance and dialogue, and whether organisational resources enable teachers to act on identified needs.

The cross-theme synthesis can therefore be represented as a provisional analytic model of a supported motivational-developmental process. This model is offered solely as a qualitative organising device derived from the present case. It is not a tested causal sequence and requires further empirical examination before any stronger claims can be advanced. Table 4 summarises the stages of developmental appraisal, their functions, and potential barriers to sustained professional learning.

Table 4

Proposed supported motivational-developmental process model

Stage	Developmental function	Potential disruption identified in the study
Formal expectations	Clarifies professional standards and appraisal criteria	Formal clarity without equivalent consistency of enactment
Observation and evidence	Generates information about professional practice	Infrequent or pre-announced observation may limit representativeness
Feedback	Makes performance information usable for improvement	Generic, delayed or insufficiently actionable feedback
Reflection and goal setting	Creates teacher participation and ownership of improvement priorities	Form completion or limited participation
Supported action	Provides opportunities to practise and develop new approaches	Weak training, mentoring, resources and protected time
Review and further feedback	Assesses progress and sustains professional learning	Weak follow-up and return to the annual appraisal cycle

Note. The model is a provisional qualitative synthesis of participants' accounts from the five schools examined in this study. It identifies process conditions under which appraisal was perceived as more or less developmental. It is not a validated causal model and should be treated as a sensitising framework pending further testing through comparative, longitudinal or mixed-methods research. The value of this synthesis lies in showing how the five themes are analytically connected without treating them as independent determinants. Formal standardisation establishes expectations but does not guarantee consistent enactment. Observation generates evidence, but its developmental value depends on the quality and representativeness of that evidence. Feedback can identify a direction for improvement, but its usefulness depends on specificity, timeliness and actionability. Teacher participation can facilitate reflection and goal setting, but participation may remain procedural when teachers have limited influence over the conversation. Relational

legitimacy can affect whether feedback is trusted and accepted, while organisational capacity determines whether teachers have realistic opportunities to act on identified needs.

The process also explains the apparently contradictory accounts in the data. Participants could simultaneously regard appraisal as useful and identify serious weaknesses in its implementation. There is no necessary contradiction if appraisal is understood as a process whose developmental consequences depend on the connections among its constituent activities. An appraisal encounter may produce useful feedback while the broader system fails to provide the resources required to act on that feedback. Similarly, a teacher may make an immediate instructional adjustment in response to an observation without sustaining that change after the evaluative event. The concept of a broken development loop therefore captures the principal cross-theme interpretation. The loop is interrupted when appraisal identifies a professional need but subsequent supported action or review does not occur. In such circumstances, the appraisal system may generate information without reliably converting that information into sustained professional learning.

This interpretation also clarifies the contribution of the study to the existing theoretical framing. GST helps explain the importance of clear expectations, feedback, and goal-directed action, while SDT draws attention to autonomy, competence, and relatedness in the experience of appraisal. The qualitative evidence suggests that these mechanisms are interconnected rather than operating independently. Clear expectations may have limited developmental value without meaningful teacher participation. Feedback may have limited value without organisational support. Participation may be constrained when relationships are characterised by fear or low trust. Organisational support may be insufficient if appraisal evidence is weak or feedback is not actionable.

The study therefore proposes that the developmental use of teacher performance appraisal is best understood, within the bounds of this case, as a supported motivational-developmental process. The proposition remains interpretive. The study does not test whether appraisal improves teacher effectiveness, nor does it establish that the proposed sequence operates identically across schools. Further research is required to examine the robustness of the model under different organisational conditions and over successive appraisal cycles.

4.2.8 Contribution to Research and Practice

The study makes three related contributions. Conceptually, it distinguishes the formal standardisation of appraisal from the conditions of its enactment. Empirically, it shows how feedback quality, teacher participation, relational legitimacy and organisational capacity interact in participants' accounts of developmental appraisal. Analytically, it brings these dimensions together in a supported motivational-developmental cycle that identifies where the process may be interrupted.

The findings also qualify any simple interpretation of appraisal as either developmental or administrative. The same formal system can perform both functions depending on how it is enacted. Appraisal can generate useful instructional reflection where observation is credible, feedback is actionable, teachers participate meaningfully, and organisational support is available. Conversely, where these connections are weak, appraisal may remain largely episodic and compliance-oriented. The proposed process should therefore be treated as a qualitative analytical model generated from the present case rather than as a validated model of teacher appraisal. Its value lies in providing a process explanation that can be examined in other educational settings through comparative or longitudinal research.

V. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

This study examined how teacher performance appraisal was implemented in selected public basic schools in the Bibiani-Anhwiaso-Bekwai Municipality, how participants perceived its contribution to professional and instructional practice, and the organisational and relational conditions shaping its developmental use. The findings show that schools operated within a common GES appraisal framework, but its enactment varied in frequency, depth and developmental quality. Formal appraisal was often annual, while classroom observations were sometimes announced in advance, limiting how well appraisal captured routine teaching practice. Thus, formal standardisation did not necessarily result in consistent developmental enactment.

Participants perceived appraisal as more useful when feedback was specific, timely and actionable. Reported instructional adjustments included changes in lesson preparation, questioning, pacing, student engagement and checking for understanding. However, some changes appeared closely tied to immediate evaluation demands, suggesting that appraisal may generate short-term compliance as well as more sustained professional reflection. The findings therefore support a conditional contribution of appraisal to professional and instructional practice rather than a direct causal effect on teacher effectiveness.

The developmental use of appraisal was shaped by teacher agency, relational legitimacy and organisational capacity. Self-evaluation and participatory dialogue could strengthen reflection and ownership, while trust, fairness and transparent documentation could enhance the credibility of appraisal judgements. Conversely, power asymmetry,

perceived bias, workload, limited appraiser preparation and insufficient subject-specific expertise could constrain the process. A particularly important constraint was the weak connection between identified developmental needs and subsequent professional-development support.

The findings support a process view of appraisal in which formal expectations, observation, feedback, reflection and goal setting, supported action, and review need to be connected for appraisal to contribute meaningfully to professional learning. When these elements are disconnected, appraisal may be procedurally complete but developmentally incomplete. The study therefore identifies a broken development loop in which professional needs may be recognised without being consistently followed by the institutional support required to address them.

The study does not claim statistical generalisability or establish that appraisal causes improvements in teacher effectiveness. Its contribution is explanatory, showing how appraisal may support professional learning under particular organisational and relational conditions and why that process may be interrupted. The integration of Goal-Setting Theory and Self-Determination Theory further indicates that goals and feedback are more likely to support professional learning when teachers have meaningful participation, constructive relationships, and sufficient organisational support.

5.2 Recommendations

The Ghana Education Service should strengthen implementation guidance so that appraisal is enacted as a recurrent developmental process rather than primarily as an annual documentation exercise. Guidance should clarify expectations concerning observation, timely feedback, teacher participation, goal setting, and follow-up review. The Municipal Education Directorate should establish a clearer mechanism for linking appraisal findings to professional-development planning. Identified needs should inform training, mentoring and other forms of support so that the connection between diagnosis and supported action is strengthened. Headteachers should receive regular preparation in classroom observation, evidence-based judgement, specific and actionable feedback, feedback conversations, management of disagreement, procedural fairness and documentation. Appraiser development should extend beyond orientation to the appraisal form.

Appraisal should provide structured opportunities for teacher self-evaluation and dialogue before final judgements are reached. Teachers should, where feasible, participate in identifying professional priorities and reviewing progress. Dated and transparent documentation should be maintained to strengthen the evidential basis of appraisal. Where headteachers lack subject-specific expertise, the GES and Municipal Education Directorate should consider complementary mechanisms such as peer observation, subject-based professional learning communities or access to appropriately qualified reviewers. Finally, expectations for continuous appraisal should be matched with adequate time and administrative support for headteachers. Without sufficient organisational capacity, the expectation of continuous observation, feedback and follow-up may remain difficult to realise.

Declaration of Interest

The authors declare that they do not have any known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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