ESL Teachers' Perceptions of the Individual Plan Measurement System (IPMS) and Its Impact on Professional Development

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Abstract

This research paper extrapolates the perceptions of English Language teachers about the effectiveness of the newly introduced Individual Plan Measurement System (IPMS) in terms of task performance at the University of Technology and Applied Sciences, Al Musannah (UTASA), Oman, and how this new performance appraisal system has contributed to teachers' professional development. For the current study, the researchers employed a mixed methods approach by administering a survey questionnaire among the ESL teachers (N=31) of UTASA, conducting a semi-structured interview with selected staff members (N=7), and analyzing the data related to professional development activities conducted before and after the implementation of the new appraisal system. The study shows that most UTAS-A ELC staff perceive that IPMS has helped them plan and execute their professional goals effectively. Furthermore, the findings of the study highlight that a timebound individual plan guided and monitored by institutional agencies has a positive effect on employees' intrinsic motivation and professional development, and it can make their task performance more efficient and systematic.

Keywords: teachers' perception, Individual Plan Measuring System, performance appraisal, professional development, task performance

1. Introduction

It is essential to have an appraisal system to measure employee performance against clearly set goals and objectives and give staff guidance on their professional development and training needs. Besides, it helps the stakeholders identify the merits and drawbacks of employee performance and establish a framework to ensure institutional standards. Moreover, it gives employees detailed feedback on task performance and offers proper guidance and support to set future goals. Therefore, most policymakers, employers and stakeholders believe that employee performance should be periodically evaluated to enhance the efficiency of the workforce and to effectively manage the potential of the human capital of public and private sector organizations. Some standard methods of measuring individual performance are Management by Objectives (MBO), 360 Degree Feedback Method, Assessment Centre Method, Human Resource Accounting Method, Behaviorally Anchored Rating Scale Method (BARS), Psychological Appraisals, etc. Although there are many things in common among these methods, each one varies from the other as it is specifically designed for certain professions and types of business.

EJADA is a digital platform that facilitates human capital governance by providing appropriate tools for building a culture of proficiency in employee performance, improving performance appraisal systems, and linking productivity with incentives. Individual Performance Measurement System (IPMS) is a part of this E-governance that aims to achieve greater efficiency and accountability in employee performance and better transparency in the individual performance appraisal system. Therefore, it gives due importance to professional development activities in addition to the routine tasks associated with one's profession. The researchers found that implementing the new appraisal system, which is more scientific, objective, and centralized, had given an added impetus to professional development activities and significantly contributed to the overall performance of ESL teachers at UTASA.

1.1 Research Questions

The current study addresses the following questions:

1)   What are ESL teachers 'perceptions of the Individual Plan Measurement Systems (IPMS) regarding task

performance?

2) How does the Individual Plan Measurement System (IPMS) affect professional development activities in the English Language Centre of UTASA?

3) Is there a statistical difference between the perceptions of male and female teachers about the Individual Plan Measurement Systems (IPMS) regarding task performance?

2. Literature Review

Individual work performance is considered actions or behaviors directed towards achieving organizational goals; therefore, it needs to be carefully planned, monitored and subject to review. Setting goals is essential for task performance because goals are the primary source of an individual's motivation (Locke, E. A., & Latham, G. P., 2013). Measuring individual work performance has recently received much attention (Dalal, R. S., 2005). Individual performance has four dimensions: task performance, contextual performance, adaptive performance, and counterproductive work behavior (Koopmans et al., 2014). Among these dimensions, adaptive performance is paramount in teaching and training. The primary indicator to measure this quality is the various activities teachers engage in voluntarily to keep their knowledge and skills up to date.

Good quality task performance requires employees who are highly knowledgeable and professionally skilled (Vogus et al., 2014). The main factor influencing the workplace's psychological climate is the institutional and employee-level outcomes contributing to the operational plan and individual worker's target (Kuenzi & Schminke, 2009; Parker et al., 2003). Hetland et al. (2022) define task performance as the effectiveness with which an employee performs activities that contribute to the organization's technical core, either directly by implementing a part of its technological process or indirectly by providing it with needed materials or services.

When the appraisal of employee performance is determined by normative criteria, the employees tend to set performance-approach goals and try to perform their tasks to the best of their abilities, which will, in turn, enhance the intrinsic motivation to outperform their colleagues (Gorozidis et al., 2021). However, some studies show that performance goals impair the participation of employees in various activities, causing stress at work (Heyman & Dweck, 1992; Nicholls, 1989).

The concept of the performance evaluation process has a positive effect on the intrinsic motivation of employees, which could further lead to professional development (Ali, Mahdi, & Malihe, 2012). According to Hornqren et al. (2002), evaluating work performance is equally important for both employees and the organization in attaining their goals. When employees make sincere efforts to achieve their personal goals that align with the institution's strategic and operational plans, they directly contribute to the mission the organization wants to accomplish and, in turn, get due recognition and rewards. For teachers, professional development is essential to equip themselves with the strategies and resources to cater to the learning demands of the dynamic student community (Binu, 2019).

The most direct and immediate effect of excellent task performance is professional enhancement. Richard and Farell (2005) list five aspects of professional development: reflective practice, mastery of the subject, action research, collaboration and taking additional roles and responsibilities. Critical reflection encourages teachers to examine their professional activities critically to understand the pedagogical issues in the classroom to improve the quality of teaching (Boud, 2010). Reflective Teaching is a process of self-observation and self-evaluation, which means looking at what you do in the classroom, why you do it, and see if it works (Tice, 2004). Through thoughtful reflection, experimentation, and evaluation, teachers can better create meaningful learning experiences for themselves and their students (Gibson et al., 2011; Jose, 2023).

2.1 Gender Differences

Gender differences matter when it comes to the acceptance of new models in employee performance and evaluation (Duxbury & Higgins, 1991). Male and female employees use different information bases when responding to performance measurement systems (Hind & Baruch, 1997). According to Igbaria and Baroudi (1995), the effect of job performance on attributions is more substantial in male employees than in female employees. The performance appraisals of female managers are slightly superior to their male counterparts (Millmore, Biggs, & Morse, 2007). However, a study conducted in the USA reveals that there is no significant difference between males and females in job satisfaction (Mason, 1995).

An appraisal system managed by objectives would enable teachers to identify the areas they need to focus on for professional development and include them in their individual plans as goals and objectives. Cruickshank and Haefele (2001) believe that good teachers are ideal, analytical, dutiful, competent and reflective. Therefore, periodic performance can significantly contribute to professional development, giving them constructive feedback on their performance and motivation to become more creative and resourceful.

3. Research Methodology

For the current study, the researchers employed a mixed methods approach which included administering a survey questionnaire among the ESL teachers of UTASA, conducting a semi-structured interview with selected staff (N=7) and examining and analyzing the data related to professional development activities at UTASA in comparison with the previous academic year's (2021-22) record. Almeida (2018) believes that a mixed methods approach is more effective in generating better results for the study as it helps to overcome the defects of both qualitative and quantitative research methods. Ivankova and Creswell (2009) state that a mixed methods approach enables the researcher to gather both quantitative and qualitative data through questionnaires and interviews, which will develop a better understanding of the research questions. However, this approach is not without shortcomings, as it requires more research instruments and time (Robson and McCartan, 2016). In addition, Almashy (2016) states that the information gathered from qualitative and quantitative methods could be conflicting, requiring additional tools for data collection.

4. Findings

The questionnaire survey, the main tool used for this study, included six different aspects of tasks at the workplace to measure the professional performance of the survey participants. They are listed in Table 1.

Table 1. Task performance variables

Sl. Nos.	Items
1	IPMS has helped me manage to plan my work so that it is done on time.
2	My planning was optimal (best/most favourable) due to IPMS
3	IPMS consistently reminded me of the goals and results that I had to achieve related to my work.
4	IPMS helped me know how to set the right priorities.
5	With IPMS, I was able to perform my work well with minimal time and effort.
6	IPMS made collaboration with others at work very productive.

4.1 General Analysis and Findings

The general analysis and findings are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. IPMS & task performance-an overview

Sl. Nos.	Items
1	IPMS has helped me manage to plan my work so that it is done on time.
2	My planning was optimal (best/most favourable) due to IPMS
3	IPMS consistently reminded me of the goals and results that I had to achieve related to my work.
4	IPMS helped me know how to set the right priorities.
5	With IPMS, I was able to perform my work well with minimal time and effort.
6	IPMS made collaboration with others at work very productive.

Generally, more than half of respondents (50% to 67%) responded quite positively to items 1 to 4 (Table 1). 33% and 43% of survey participants agreed with items 5 and 6, respectively. In addition, Table two illustrates that more than a quarter of respondents (27% to 30%) opposed items 1 to 3 and 5, while 50% of respondents disagreed that there were able to perform their work well with minimal time and effort with IPMS (Item 4). Some participants maintained a neutral stance on all items; 27% of the participants were undecided about whether IPMS made collaboration with others at work very productive (Figure 1).
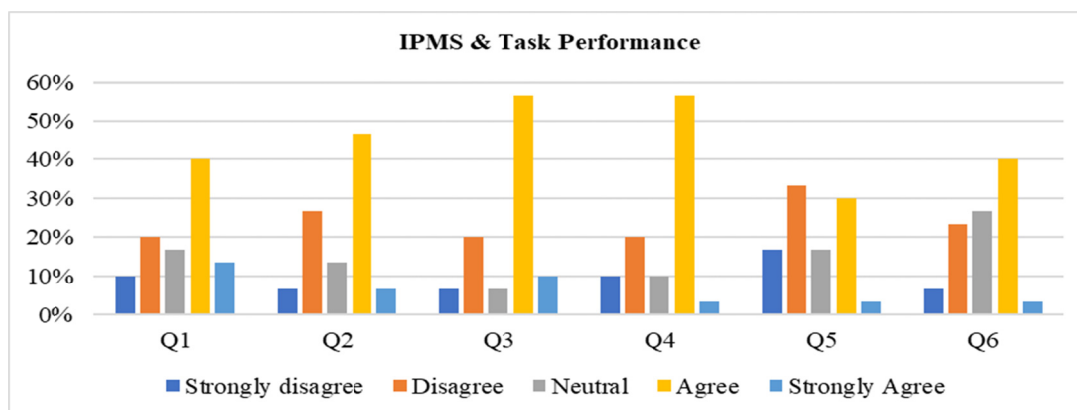
Figure 1. IPMS and task performance – an overview

4.2 Gender-Wise Analysis

The study included both males and females, and their feedback could provide better insights into the impact of IPMS on their task performance. The following section, therefore, presents a gender-wise analysis of respondents' perceptions of each dependent variable.

4.2.1 IPMS Has Helped Me Manage to Plan My Work So That It Is Done On Time

Table 3. IPMS & planning to finish task on time

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Male	9%	18%	9%	64%	0%
Female	11%	21%	21%	26%	21%

Table three describes how male and female ELC lecturers felt about the role of IPMS in helping them finish their tasks on time. While most males (64%) agreed that it helped them complete their work on time, a little less than half of females (47%) felt optimistic about it. 21% of females maintained a neutral position, and 32% did not think IPMS helped them finish tasks on time (Figure 2).
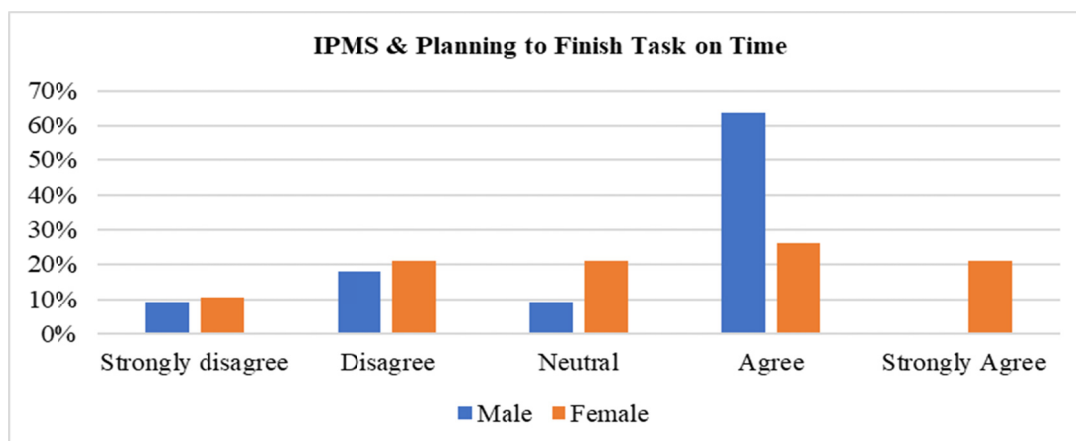

Figure 2. IPMS & planning to finish task on time

4.2.2 My Planning Was Optimal (Best/Most Favourable) Due to IPMS

Table 4. IPMS & optimal planning

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	TOTAL
Male	0%	18%	9%	64%	9%	100%
Female	5%	32%	16%	37%	11%	100%

As can be seen from Table four, 64% of males and 49% of females felt that IPMS facilitated optimal planning at work. On the other hand, 37% of females disagreed with it, and 16% of them were undecided (Figure 3).
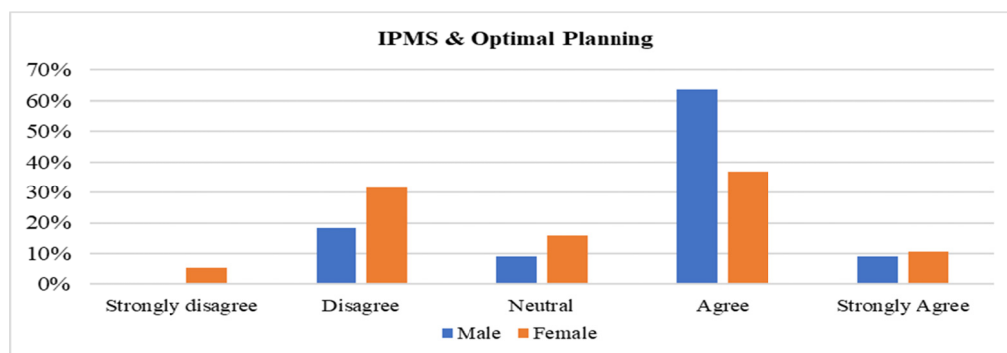

Figure 3. IPMS & optimal planning

4.2.3 IPMS Consistently Reminded Me of the Goals and Results I Had to Achieve Related to My Work

Table 5. IPMS and reminders

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	TOTAL
Male	0%	27%	0%	73%	0%	100%
Female	11%	16%	11%	47%	16%	100%

A vast majority of both males and females (73% and 63%, respectively) opined that IPMS served as a reminder of their work goals and results that they need to achieve during their work. Nevertheless, more than a quarter of males and females (27%) disagreed with this (Table 5, Figure 4).
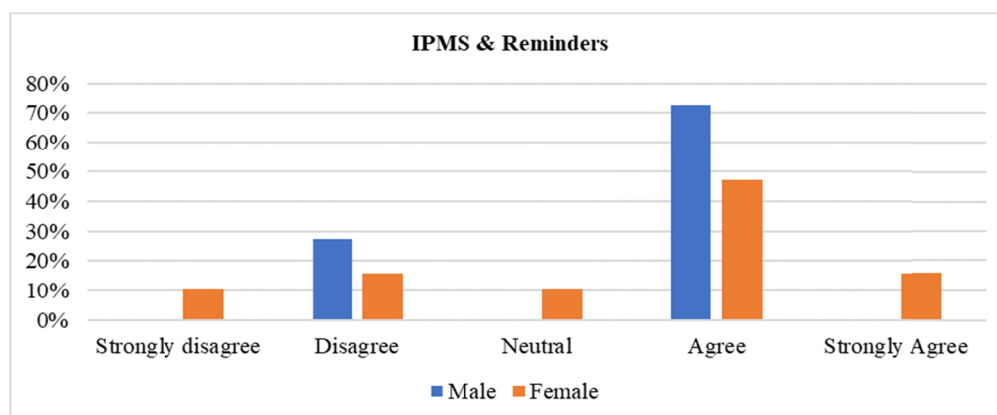

Figure 4. IPMS & reminders

4.2.4 IPMS Helped Me Know How to Set the Right Priorities

Table 6. IPMS & setting priorities

	Strongly dDisagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	TOTAL
Male	0%	18%	18%	64%	0%	100%
Female	16%	21%	5%	53%	5%	100%

Regarding IMPS helping ELC staff to know how to set priorities at work (Table 6), the majority of both male (64%) and female (53%) respondents concurred that it helped them prioritize their tasks, whereas 37% of females opposed to it (Figure 5).
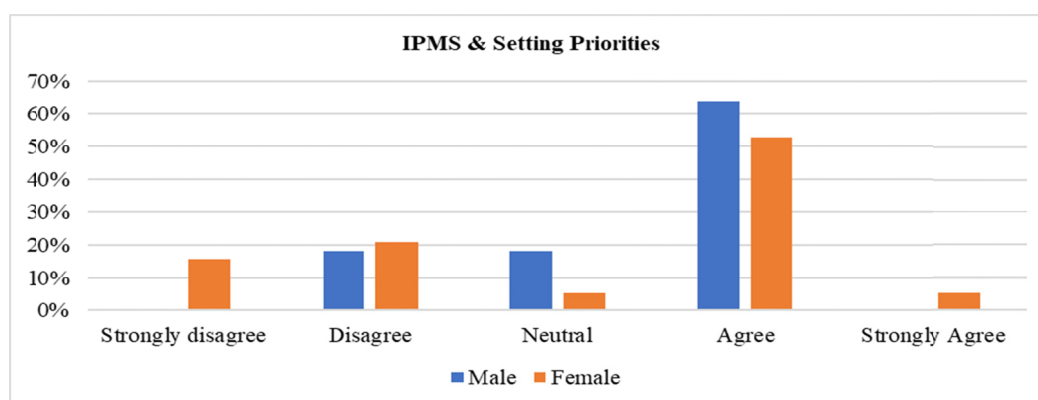

Figure 5. IPMS & setting priorities

4.2.5 With IPMS, I Was Able to Perform My Work Well with Minimal Time and Effort

Table 7. IPMS & work performance

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	TOTAL
Male	9%	18%	18%	55%	0%	100%
Female	21%	42%	16%	16%	5%	100%

About IPMS enabling work performance with minimal time and effort, a little more than half of male respondents (55%) reported that it did not help them, whereas 27% of males and 63% of females disagreed with this (Table 7, Figure 6).
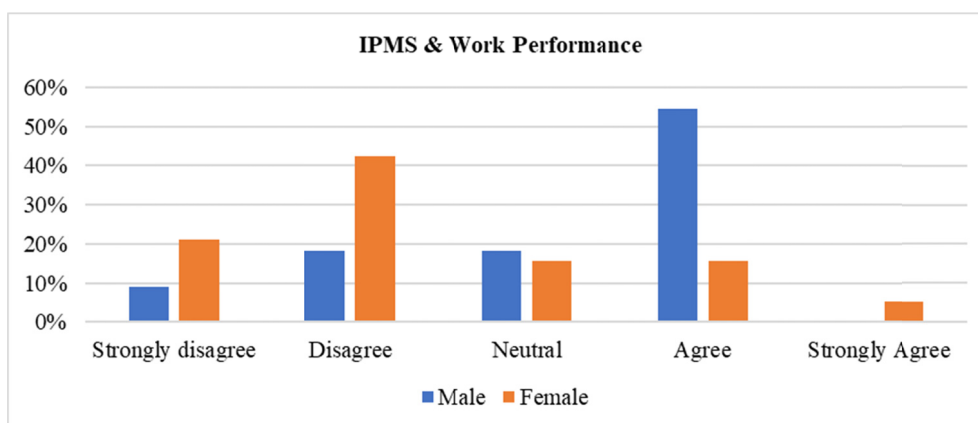

Figure 6. IPMS and work performance

4.2.6 IPMS Made Collaboration with Others at Work Very Productive

Table 8. IPMS & collaboration

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	TOTAL
Male	9%	18%	9%	64%	0%	100%
Female	5%	26%	37%	26%	5%	100%

Table eight illustrates that male and female respondents have mixed responses regarding the role of IPMS in facilitating collaboration at work. While most males (64%) responded positively to this view, only 31% of females agreed. The same percentage of females (31%) opposed the idea that IPMS promotes collaboration with others at work as very productive, and 37% of them were undecided (Figure 7).
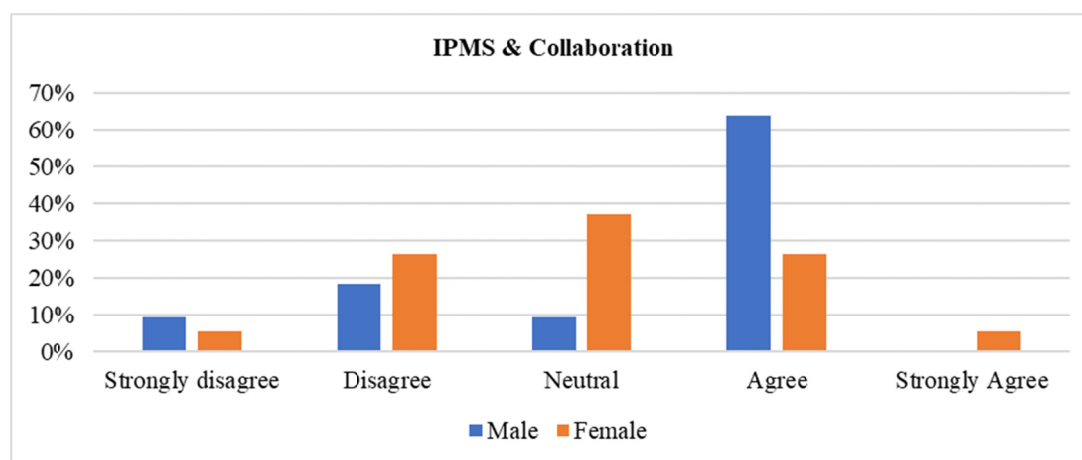

Figure 7. IPMS & collaboration

5. Qualitative Data

The qualitative data obtained through open-ended questions of the survey questionnaire and semi-structured interviews with selected participants are broadly categorized into two broad themes, namely strengths and challenges, as presented below. The respondents' words in verbatim are italicized in column two, and the respondents are coded as T1 (Teacher 1), T2 and so on (Table 9) in column 1.

Table 9. Qualitative data analysis – main themes and respondents' verbatim remarks

Theme 1: Strengths	
T1	*"IPMS builds a culture of performance evaluation."*
T2	*"It ensures fairness and transparency in performance evaluation."*
T3	*"... an effective top-down system for tracking individual performance."*
T4	*"... improve institutional standards."*
T5	*"... enhances accountability and quality service in public and private institutions."*
T6	*"...digital and dynamic, quite suitable for the modern world."*
Theme 2: Challenges	
T1	*"IPMS promotes a corporate culture in the academic field."*
T2	*"There is a lack of clarity on rewarding good performance."*
T3	*"It is more suitable for the profit-oriented private sector."*
T4	*"... no opportunities for changing or modifying goals."*
T5	*"... not practical for long-research projects."*
T6	*"All goals cannot be achieved in a timebound manner."*
T7	*"Evaluation is only based on the OKRs. Hence, the achievements made after the submission of the Individual Plan go unrecognised and unrewarded."*

6. Discussion

The results of this study indicate that most ESL teachers of UTASA are optimistic about the latest appraisal system as it significantly contributes to task achievement. Individual Performance Measurement System (EJADA IPMS), an integral part of the Sultanate of Oman's e-governance and vision 2040, aims to achieve greater efficiency and accountability in employee performance and better transparency in the individual performance appraisal system. Unlike the previous staff appraisal system at UTASA, which was paper-based and done only once annually, IPMS is quite distinct with its unique features of assessing the overall performance of an employee. For example, in the previous staff appraisal system, a teacher's performance was evaluated in five categories, namely lesson observation (25%), student feedback on teaching (25%), evaluation by the head of the English Language Centre (20%), evaluation by the heads of the two sections of the ELC: Curriculum and Teaching Methods and English Language Programme (20%) and peer evaluation (10%). The total points obtained from these variables were later combined into a single composite score of 5 on the Likert scale.

A notable difference between the two appraisal systems is that there was no significant importance to professional development in the previous system. However, in the EJADA IPMS, professional development is one of the main objectives of an employee's individual plan. Every staff member is required to set objectives in their individual plans under three broad categories, which are related to the strategic and operational plan of the institution, academic and administrative duties and professional development. Employees have a range of options to set their objectives and key results (OKRs) based on their personal goals, and they are guided and supported by their institutions to attain them. Moreover, they are given due recognition and rewards for achieving their personal goals, which benefit the individuals as well as their institutions. Thus, IPMS facilitates the governance of human capital by providing appropriate tools for building a culture of proficiency in employee performance, improving performance appraisal systems, and linking productivity with incentives.

The inclusion of professional development as one of the main objectives in the individual plan encouraged all staff to actively engage in activities such as participating in internal and external academic events, conducting workshops and seminars, obtaining membership in professional bodies, conducting short-term action research, enrolling in short-term courses, and writing book reviews, articles and research papers. Based on the above observations, the researchers conclude that the sudden increase in professional development activities the English Language Centre of UTASA witnessed could be attributed to the direct and immediate effect of IPMS. However, further study is needed to establish whether this quantitative increase has enhanced the quality of teaching and learning.

Referring to the third research question about the difference between the perceptions of male and female teachers regarding the Individual Plan Measurement Systems (IPMS) in terms of task performance, it is worth mentioning that females have slightly different perceptions of IPMS regarding task performance. However, generally, they maintain a balanced or unfavourable perception of various items in the survey. The dynamics behind female perceptions and why many male and female teachers remained neutral about task performance will be investigated in the next phase of this exploratory research.

It was from the semi-structured interviews and open-ended questions of the survey questionnaire that the researchers could obtain views about the downsides of the IPMS as the participants had the opportunity to express their feelings freely. Keeping interviews open-ended allows participants to share their diverse experiences without inhibition (Tamim, 2021). The main criticism against IPMS is the absence of a typical graphic rating scale to measure the performance of an employee. Instead, it places the individual performance into three broad categories; above expectation, meet the expectation and below expectation which makes it difficult for an employee to understand how close or distant their performance is from their desired target. At the end of each cycle, the employees self-evaluate their plan, meet their line manager to present the results with evidence and finally receive a rating once their plan is approved. Most participants opined that the performance appraisal system should be customized to suit the specific requirements of each industry or service sector.

7. Limitations

One of the limitations of this study is the limited sample size, which makes generalizing the statistical result a bit challenging since a larger sample size would lead to accurate results and valid conclusions. Another critical drawback of this study is the lack of previous research on this topic, as it is a pioneer study on ESL teachers' perceptions of IPMS in the Sultanate of Oman. Finally, time constraints added to the limitations as the researchers employed a mixed methods approach using various research instruments. However, these limitations are not so severe as to invalidate the research findings or undermine their value in the eyes of the stakeholders; rather, they open new avenues and scope for further research in this area. Furthermore, being an exploratory study, the

researchers intend to build on the results of the initial phase addressing the limitations by expanding the sample size and duration in the follow-up stage to gain valuable insights into the teacher perceptions of IPMS and draw logical conclusions about its effectiveness.

8. Conclusion

In conclusion, the majority of participants of this study are of the view that it is essential to have an appraisal system to measure employee performance against clearly set goals and objectives and identify their professional development and training needs. Moreover, they believe that an effective performance management system helps employees set on a journey of improvement, constantly evaluating what works best for their professional enhancement. The findings of this study obtained from the survey questionnaire, semi-structured interview, and the data analysis related to professional development activities at the English Language Centre for the academic years 2021-22 and 2022-23 suggest that most ESL staff at the University of Technology and Applied Sciences, Al-Musannah believe that implementing the new appraisal system, which is scientific, objective, and centralised, has given a fresh impetus to professional development activities and significantly contributed to the overall performance of teachers Although this study has brought to light the perceptions of ESL teachers about the effectiveness of IPMS on task achievement and professional development, further research in this area is recommended.

9. Recommendations

This research paper contributes to the current literature on employee performance appraisal systems by systematically highlighting study participants' perceptions with suggestions and recommendations for further research. Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations can be made, which could be valuable for all stakeholders:

· The teaching staff should be provided with opportunities for modifying certain goals and OKRs in IPMS.

· Teachers may be given a longer duration for achieving research-based goals.

· Staff may be allowed flexibility in setting objectives and key results in their individual plans.

· Stakeholders should redefine the overall impact of IPMS regarding promotion and rewards.

· Stakeholders should plan and act on setting more effective qualitative assessment standards.

· IPMS should be tailor-made for each industry/service sector.

· Further research should be conducted on the implications of IPMS on employees' contextual performance and counterproductive work behavior.

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Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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Obtained.

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The Publication Ethics Committee of the Canadian Center of Science and Education.

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The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

Data sharing statement

No additional data are available.