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A Study on the Influencing Factors of the Performance Appraisal System of Teachers in Universities of Heilongjiang Province, China

Zhu Xuefeng[1], Junainah Binti Abd Hamid[2], Jacquline Tham[3]
[1]Graduate School of Management, Postgraduate Centre, Management and Science University, Shah Alam, Malaysia
[2]Post Graduate Centre, Management and Science University, Shah Alam, Malaysia
[3]Post Graduate Centre, Management and Science University, Shah Alam, Malaysia
Email address: 94177293@qq.com

Abstract*—This study presents a comparative analysis of faculty performance appraisal systems in Chinese and American universities, with a specific focus on institutions in Heilongjiang Province, China. Drawing on extensive literature review and field research, the paper explores the historical development, current challenges, and reform trajectories of performance evaluation in higher education. The study identifies key issues in China's appraisal practices, including misaligned indicators, emphasis on quantity over quality, insufficient feedback mechanisms, and superficial evaluations of teaching and social service. In contrast, American universities have evolved comprehensive, development-oriented systems emphasizing faculty participation and professional growth. The research aims to uncover the institutional gaps between Chinese and world-class universities, offering targeted recommendations to optimize China's appraisal framework. The findings suggest that incorporating advanced evaluation concepts from international models—while adapting them to China's unique educational context—can foster a more scientific, fair, and motivational system. Ultimately, this work contributes to the enhancement of teacher quality, institutional governance, and sustainable development in China's higher education sector*.

***Keywords*—** *Performance appraisal system, higher education, university faculty , institutional comparison, educational evaluation, teacher assessment system*.

I. Introduction

In the context of global human resource management, performance appraisal systems play a vital role in enhancing institutional efficiency, especially within higher education. These systems provide feedback, support professional development, and align individual and organizational goals (Mohammadi, 2021; El-Gebali et al., 2019). In universities, faculty performance appraisal typically evaluates teaching quality, research output, ethics, and service contributions (Zheng & Sun, 2022). However, many appraisal systems, especially in China, face persistent challenges such as unclear objectives, lack of feedback mechanisms, and an overemphasis on quantitative results (Huang, 2019; Liu, 2022).

The origin of modern teacher performance appraisal can be traced to early 20th-century reforms in the U.S., with the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) playing a central role. The 1940 "Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure" marked a turning point in institutionalizing faculty evaluation in American universities (Aper & Fry, 2003). Over time, U.S. universities developed robust systems linked to faculty promotion, tenure, and institutional ranking. Inspired by these models, other countries have adopted or adapted performance appraisal systems based on their educational and cultural contexts (Shang, 2022).

In China, systematic faculty appraisal began in the 1990s and has since undergone several policy-driven reforms (Liu, 2021). In Heilongjiang Province, institutions have begun implementing structured appraisals focused on teaching load and research output (Fan et al., 2018). However, most systems still prioritize quantity over quality and lack multidimensional evaluation frameworks. As such, universities are exploring customized systems that better align with academic missions and human-centered education values (Liang et al., 2018).

II. Problem Statement

Performance appraisal for university faculty is a fundamental component of academic human resource management. It serves as a "guiding baton" that enhances faculty motivation and drives high-quality institutional development (Zheng & Sun, 2022). In recent years, Chinese policymakers have emphasized the importance of building a high-caliber teaching workforce, recognizing performance evaluation as a key mechanism for improving teacher quality (Cui, 2022). With over 3,000 higher education institutions across China—and more than 37,000 full-time faculty members in 39 undergraduate universities in Heilongjiang Province alone—annual performance reviews are a standard practice (Fan et al., 2018). These evaluations significantly influence personnel decisions related to hiring, promotion, compensation, and academic advancement (Liu, 2022).

Despite their importance, many universities adopt undifferentiated, "one-size-fits-all" appraisal models. This homogenized approach contributes to the convergence and lack of innovation in China's higher education sector (Surasni et al., 2020). Five major challenges frequently emerge in practice:

Misalignment with institutional vision – Performance indicators often fail to align with a university's strategic development goals, hindering the personalized growth of faculty (Zhu, 2020).

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Inaccurate teaching assessment – Teaching contributions are frequently measured in terms of course hours, with little attention paid to teaching quality, student development, or mentoring (Huang, 2019).
Overemphasis on research quantity – There is a prevailing focus on the number of publications, while research quality and innovation are neglected, contributing to academic formalism (Padhaya et al., 2021).
Tokenism in social service evaluation – Social contributions are assessed in a perfunctory way, lacking systematic evaluation tools or incentive structures (Meng, 2006).
Absence of feedback mechanisms – Teachers rarely receive meaningful feedback, weakening the appraisal system's motivational and developmental functions (El-Gebali et al., 2019).

To address these issues, scholars and policymakers call for the development of a scientific, context-sensitive, and development-oriented performance appraisal system tailored to the characteristics of higher education (Mohammadi, 2021). A well-designed framework should not only ensure fairness and accountability but also promote faculty excellence in teaching, research, and service, thereby fostering sustainable institutional development (Aggarwal & Thakur, 2013).

III. Research Objectives and Research Questions

3.1Research Objective

The primary objective of this study is to explore the key factors influencing the optimization of the performance appraisal system for faculty members in higher education institutions, with a specific focus on universities in Heilongjiang Province, China.

Specific Objectives

1.To examine the relationship between school vision and performance appraisal system optimization strategies in Heilongjiang universities.
2.To investigate how teaching and learning outcomes are related to the optimization of the performance appraisal system in Heilongjiang universities.
3.To analyze the correlation between scientific research performance and optimization strategies in the performance appraisal system of Heilongjiang universities.
4.To explore the influence of social service engagement on the optimization of the performance appraisal system in Heilongjiang universities.
5.To assess the role of feedback mechanisms in performance appraisal results and their impact on optimization strategies.
6.To evaluate the overall impact of the existing performance appraisal system on institutional optimization efforts in Heilongjiang universities.

3.2 Research Questions

1.What is the relationship between school vision and the performance appraisal system in universities in Heilongjiang Province?
2.How does teaching performance influence the performance appraisal system in Heilongjiang universities?
3.What is the relationship between scientific research output and the performance appraisal system in Heilongjiang universities?
4.How does engagement in social service relate to the performance appraisal system in Heilongjiang universities?
5.What is the impact of feedback on performance appraisal results on the effectiveness and optimization of the performance appraisal system?
6.How does the existing performance appraisal system influence the optimization strategies adopted by Heilongjiang universities?

IV. Significance of Study

This study holds significant practical and theoretical value. Optimizing the performance appraisal system for university faculty is not only crucial for individual professional development, but also directly impacts the quality of talent cultivation and the realization of strategic institutional goals (Zheng & Sun, 2022; Cui, 2022). As China's higher education sector advances personnel reforms, performance-based salary systems that link positions, duties, and compensation have become more common (Liu, 2021). While such reforms have enhanced teacher motivation, they have also introduced operational challenges. Therefore, it is urgent to develop a scientific, rational, and incentive-driven performance appraisal framework that effectively aligns individual objectives with institutional development strategies (Zhu, 2020).

Moreover, performance appraisal serves as a key tool to translate national and societal expectations for quality education into concrete evaluation criteria (Mohammadi, 2021). By enabling classification, comparison, and social benchmarking, it encourages self-reflection among faculty members and fosters improvements in teaching behavior and educational outcomes (El-Gebali et al., 2019; Suryadi, 2017). A well-structured appraisal system helps teachers recognize differences in performance, analyze causes of shortcomings, and implement corrective strategies, thereby promoting continuous improvement.

In addition, an incentive-based performance management system is vital for unlocking educators' potential and enhancing their teaching and research capabilities (Aggarwal & Thakur, 2013). As facilitators of talent development, university faculty play a central role in shaping students' knowledge, values, and personal growth. Therefore, building a distinct, motivation-oriented performance appraisal system is a key priority for institutions aiming to strengthen their teaching workforce and meet the demands of national development (Padhaya et al., 2021). Ultimately, this research contributes to the broader goals of high-quality education and the modernization of university governance.

V. Scope of Research

This study targets full-time faculty members who participate in performance appraisals at higher education institutions in Heilongjiang Province, China. The Ministry of Education of China's National List of Higher Education

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Institutions, which was published on June 20, 2025, indicates that there are 39 undergraduate colleges and universities in Heilongjiang Province out of a total of 1,365 nationwide. The research focuses specifically on faculty members from these 39 institutions.

To define the sample, the official websites of the 39 universities and colleges were reviewed, and the number of faculty members at each institution was collected. The total number of full-time teaching staff across these institutions was found to be 37,319. This study excludes administrative personnel, teaching assistants, and support staff, focusing solely on permanent teaching faculty. Therefore, the final sample for this research consists of 37,319 university lecturers. The aim is to explore factors influencing the optimization of performance appraisal systems in the context of higher education in Heilongjiang Province.

VI. Literature Review

This study presents a comprehensive historical review of faculty performance appraisal systems, focusing on the United States and China. It traces the evolution of these systems, their theoretical underpinnings, policy reforms, and practical applications, offering a comparative perspective on how higher education institutions have approached the evaluation of teaching staff over time.

6.1 The Development History of the Faculty Performance Appraisal System in American Universities

The notion of evaluating faculty performance in the United States may be traced back to the colonial period. Early forms of evaluation involved lay community members attending lectures, which marked a rudimentary attempt to assess teaching. During the 17th to mid-19th centuries, the status of university lecturers was low; their responsibilities focused more on discipline and administration than actual teaching. Professors were few, and appointments were made arbitrarily by university presidents or boards. Academic professionalism was underdeveloped, and standards for faculty recruitment or promotion were minimal (Finkelstein, 1984).

The post-Civil War era saw gradual improvements. Teaching responsibilities increased, and institutions like Harvard began to promote regular faculty to professorships. Student evaluations started to gain traction as an early performance measurement method (Geng, 2017). From the 1850s to early 1900s, formal academic hierarchies emerged, exemplified by Harvard and the University of Michigan, which introduced the ranks of assistant, associate, and full professor (Qiao, 2000).

The period from the 1930s to early 1950s marked the emergence of a structured development phase, heavily influenced by Frederick Taylor's scientific management principles. The "Behavioural Objectives Model" emphasized goal attainment and performance outcomes in teacher evaluations (Wu, 2008). Evaluations were summative in nature, based on whether instructors met pre-established institutional goals. However, this approach had limitations due to its rigidity and lack of adaptability.

From the late 1950s to the late 1970s, the refinement period of faculty evaluation coincided with national introspection following the Soviet Union's launch of Sputnik in 1957. This technological setback led to educational reforms in the U.S., notably the 1958 National Defence Education Act, which increased investment in science and higher education infrastructure (Wang, 2012; Fu, 1987). During this time, behaviorist theories, especially Skinner's procedural teaching approach, dominated the educational discourse. Evaluations focused on observable teaching behaviors, such as reinforcement and feedback, with emphasis on output-based measures and student learning outcomes. Teaching was seen as technical instruction, aligning with national goals to boost scientific and technological advancement (Shang, 2022).

From the 1980s onward, the performance appraisal system entered a stage of maturity. The economic downturn and rising unemployment raised concerns about educational efficacy, prompting reports like the 1983 A Nation at Risk. This led to a renewed emphasis on improving teacher quality. Evaluation processes became more systematized, with 60–75% of universities implementing formal assessment procedures (Richard, 1987). The 1990s witnessed a growing focus on scientific research, particularly among young faculty in research universities. By the late 1990s, tenure reviews gained prominence, leading to developmental and participatory evaluation practices. Teachers became active agents in the appraisal process, a shift aligned with evolving theories like constructivism and humanistic psychology (Zhang, 2008). Constructivist views encouraged a more nuanced understanding of knowledge, learning, and teaching, while humanistic psychology, spearheaded by Maslow and Rogers, emphasized personal development and self-fulfillment.

6.2 The Development History of the Faculty Performance Appraisal System in Chinese Universities

In China, faculty performance appraisal began in the 1950s as part of post-revolution nation-building. Influenced by the Soviet model, Chinese universities emphasized ideological and political qualities, academic competence, and service ability. Evaluations were tightly linked to promotion and compensation but focused mostly on teaching outcomes. This early system emphasized moral conduct and collective review, with material incentives playing a minor role (Chen, 2012).

The Cultural Revolution (1966–1976) severely disrupted higher education. Universities shut down or operated minimally, and faculty evaluation ceased entirely. Recovery began in 1979 with the introduction of Interim Provisions on Teachers' Duties and Appraisal in Colleges and Universities. These reforms marked a shift toward equal emphasis on teaching, research, and social service. Institutions began evaluating faculty based on their roles within specific departments, with personnel departments conducting annual and promotional appraisals based on ethics, ability, diligence, and performance.

The 1980s and 1990s brought further institutionalization and legal formalization of evaluation practices. Important

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milestones included China's accession to the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) in 1984 and the passage of the Teachers Law (1993) and the Education Law (1995), which provided the legal framework for assessing teachers. These laws required comprehensive assessment of political ideology, professional competence, work ethic, and job performance. As part of broader reforms, universities adopted merit-based appointment, competitive recruitment, and performance-linked salaries, making accurate evaluations essential.

Since the late 1990s, teacher evaluation in China has become more sophisticated. Evaluation indicators increasingly incorporate quantitative and qualitative data, emphasizing transparency, objectivity, and scientific methods. By 2010, most universities developed localized appraisal systems focused on five key dimensions: virtue, ability, diligence, performance, and integrity. However, challenges persist. Evaluations sometimes overemphasize research output at the expense of teaching, rely on superficial annual assessments, or neglect the developmental needs of faculty, thereby undermining motivation and educational quality (Yao, 2019).

In conclusion, both the United States and China have undergone significant evolution in their faculty performance appraisal systems. The U.S. has shifted from informal, summative approaches to participatory, developmental models influenced by psychological theories. Meanwhile, China has progressed from ideologically-driven assessments to legally grounded, multi-dimensional evaluations. While each country's path has been shaped by unique historical, political, and educational contexts, both continue to grapple with how to balance fairness, effectiveness, and motivation in assessing academic staff.

VII. Conclusion

This study focuses on a comparative analysis of faculty performance appraisal systems in Chinese and American universities. Based on extensive literature review and supplemented by field investigations, the research employs a case study approach to present the similarities, differences, and distinctive characteristics of the performance appraisal systems in both countries. This method provides a clear visual representation of the gap between Chinese universities and world-class institutions in terms of faculty evaluation mechanisms, identifies major issues within the current system, and proposes targeted recommendations for improvement. The specific research outcomes are as follows:

First, through comparative case analysis and systematic review, the researcher collected a substantial amount of literature on faculty performance appraisal in Chinese and American universities, providing valuable reference materials and theoretical foundations for future studies, and offering significant academic value.

Second, by contrasting the differences between the Chinese and American appraisal systems and integrating field data, the study conducts an in-depth analysis of current practices in faculty evaluation in Chinese universities. It further explores the feasibility of incorporating advanced and scientific evaluation concepts and methods from American universities into China's appraisal systems, aiming to promote the development of a more scientific and systematic faculty evaluation framework.

Finally, based on problem diagnosis, the study synthesizes the successful experiences of performance appraisal in American universities and, in conjunction with the specific institutional contexts of Chinese universities, puts forward several practical reform suggestions and optimization strategies. These aim to provide theoretical support and practical guidance for the improvement of faculty performance appraisal mechanisms in Chinese higher education institutions (Wang, 2016).

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